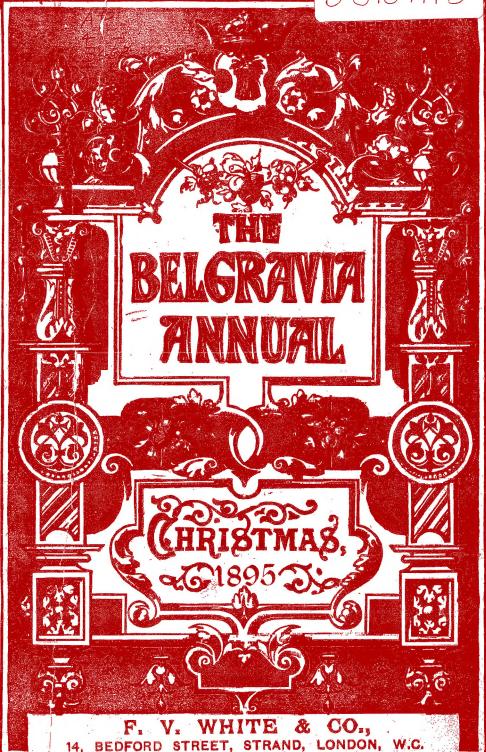
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Stories from Belgravia Annuals, Part 3 Christmas (1890-1896)

A Twin-Identity by Edith Stewart Drewry - 1891
Miss May's Guest by Nora Vynne - 1891
The Haunted Station by Hume Nisbet - 1892
The Black Pointer by Edith Stewart Drewry - 1892
Caulfield's Crime by A. Perrin - 1892
By Act of Parliament by Helen Hoppner Coode - 1893
A Substitute by Lucie H. Armstrong - 1893
Fulfilled. A Story of Fate by Maude Field - 1894
The Lifted Veil by Bevis Cane - 1895
A Hereditary Curse by Penfound Crawford - 1895
Orazio Calvo by M. P. Shiel - 1895
In This World, or the Next by Florence Marryat - 1896

A Twin=3dentity.

BY EDITH STEWART DREWRY,

Author of "For Somebody's Sake," "On Dangerous Ground," "That Odd Red Mark," &c.

"WHAT am I?" you ask, because I say I have had—though I am only thirty—a stranger experience than any with which you five gentlemen have favoured us to beguile the weary time we are snowed up in the train; and as it seems it will be quite an hour before we can get on to London, I will tell you—if you care to hear the story—why I say so, and what I am; only I hope those two ladies will not be shocked to find themselves in my company? No?—thanks—well then, I am an agent-de-police, and have just come over from Paris to spend Christmas with some English friends. Even we poor police-agents get a little holiday sometimes—hein! And the life has its attractions too, as well as its dangers and repulsions. Personally I had little choice, for I was born in the service, brought up in it, for my father was a very clever officer of the Paris Secret Police. I married in the force, widowed in it, and being one of their best women detectives, I was sure of retaining my position. Nature has favoured me, for, as you see, I am a tall but very slight made woman, with a face which lends itself well to masculine disguise. Pardons, madame, what did you say?—Oh! I make a handsome young fellow too-ha, ha! I have often been told so, and that I have a woman's wits and a man's courage. One needs both in my profession too, I can tell you; and steady nerves, too, as you will see.

Well, about this time five years ago, all Paris was suddenly startled into horror by the discovery of one of those revoltingly brutal crimes in which, I must confess, France is only occasionally rivalled by the wildest deeds of the Far West.

Some few months previously a wealthy banker, named. Folcade, had married a very pretty American girl, one of twins, who in all but personal resemblance were so absolutely as one being, and so deeply attached, as to be singular even for twins. Remember that I knew nothing of all this till nearly the termination of my connection with the case. All that the police knew was the bare fact that Madame Folcade had a sister who after the former's marriage had returned to Virginia, U.S., and was there when the tragedy took place, the news of it completely prostrating her health for months. Remember that also, please.

M. Folcade had a villa in large grounds some way out of Paris, in a lonely place, and that fatal evening the banker, having a violent headache, retired about ten o'clock, leaving his wife down in the salon reading, with her pet dog, a Scotch terrier, in the room, and that was the last the poor fellow saw of his wife and her faithful would-be defender alive. M. Folcade awoke at two in the morning, and finding himself still alone, got up, partially dressed, and went downstairs, thinking his wife had dropped asleep over her book. The salon was empty, the window open, and blood was on the floor near the wife's chair!

Monsieur was frantic, called up the household, sent for the nearest police, and every inch of the grounds was searched. a result Paris soon blazed with the horrible discovery that Madame Folcade had been stabbed to the heart (from behind, the doctor said), probably in the room, then the body carried out to a remote corner of the grounds, and literally cut up piecemeal, for the head, trunk, hands and limbs were found by degrees in different parts of the grounds; -also a long sharp-pointed knife, blood-stained, was found, and the sergent-de-police himself discovered, in a remote spot, under a bush, the body of the poor terrier all bloody from a ghastly stab, but close to its mouth, as if the teeth in the death agony had unclenched and dropped it, was a man's right hand fourth finger with a ring upon The faithful animal had evidently flown at the murderer and bitten off that little finger; then, doubtless, mortally wounded itself, fled to the bushes and died before it could reach the house with its prize. Of the assassin there was no trace whatsoever, not even a foot-print, for the ground was dry under a hard black frost.

Well, the finger was, of course, at once preserved in spirits. The signet-ring we found had a monogram on the stone in it, of "L.S." On that finger, and ring, and knife, we had to rely primarily to identify the murderer.

Of course, M. Folcade himself was questioned as under possible suspicion; but it was soon clear that he was guiltless. The marriage had been one of love. He was a fond and un-

jealous husband and one worthy of true trust; but that some savage hate and jealousy was the motive of the crime was tolerably clear. Nothing was stolen nor touched. The devilish deliberation and sequence to the murder betrayed a bloodthirsty revenge—but for what?—by whom done? A lover scorned, perhaps, but when and where? No trace, no sign of any one to suspect, present or missing, whom she had known; could be found, although M. Folcade made it understood that no expense or time should be bounded, and that the arrest of the murderer would be well recognised. You know that in France we do not allow any reward, officially or openly offered, as you do here for such things. It is done, of course, but—sub-rosa.

The case was in my especial *chef's* hands, but I was not in it then, for my hands were full, as that week I went off to Vienna on a matter of political crime which took me six months to run my men to earth and have them arrested. I only learned the details of the Folcade tragedy on my return—learned of necessity from my *chef*, M. Dupré.

"Madame Marie Lacroix," said he grimly, "I must have your aid now in this Folcade mystery."

"Eh bien! M. le Chef," I answered, "tell me all details and I obey the order."

This he did, therefore, and concluded emphatically:

"Now, although I shall not relax my efforts, it is on you, Marie, that your old *chef* relies to maintain his repute. We want the assassin; the evidence is clear. We have the man who a month before the murder sold the knife to a gentleman who he says he shall know again but cannot describe enough to be of much use—these common people are so stupid, so unobservant—*hein!* 'Rather tall, sallow, good-looking, about thirty or forty!'—bah, see there!—that would do for hundreds. Last Christmas, whilst still unmarried Madame Folcade (then Miss Grey) was in the Riviera with a lady since dead, but we could find no trace of anyone to whom suspicions would attach. Do your best, Marie, money is not to be spared—a great thing."

I was then well supplied, and withdrew. I will not trouble you with details here, but I threw myself heart and soul into this mysterious case, which had so baffled my confrères. I do not know when I have been so intensely absorbed in a case, so passionately set on success, all my faculties so entirely concen-

trated on that end. This almost abnormal enfolding of my whole being in the interests of those who had so loved the ill-fated lady, may perhaps account for the strange sequel.

I set to work my own way. I visited the Villa Folcade, saw the place, the picture of Madame Folcade there, and the knife, ring and finger in our possession, and all the people connected with the case. Then I went off to the Riviera, taking a photo of Madame, of course; went to Nice, Monte Carlo, and, after weeks of patient research I discovered that a certain Polish lady had said that at a rather mixed bal masqué last autumn she had noticed a very pretty American who was rather annoyed by the notice of a blue domino. Following up that slender chance I traced out the Pole—a work of time—and she recognised the photo, laughed at the freedom of American girls, said this one appeared to be alone and to have come in bravado, but had got frightened at the attentions or persecutions of the blue domino, had hastily resumed her mask (the Pole added), and vanished.

Here, then, was surely the root of the subsequent tragedy. A reckless "lark"—as you English say—in ignorance of the world; an encounter, probably followed by secret persecution; the girl, afraid to betray her mad escapade to her friends lest a worse construction should be put on it; the man, doubtless in love, in a fashion, jealousy, revenge—voilà tout! I returned hopefully to Monte Carlo, and, after some time, obtained the slightest clue to that blue domino, which led me to suspect that (if he were the murderer) he would have made his way to London several months after the crime, as the safest hiding-place, ma parole!—so it is—so vast—so many millions to be lost amongst.

Well, I came straight over to London, it being then the October after the murder, and at once went to Scotland Yard to put the authorities there on the qui vive for a man such as I described, lacking a finger and the hand probably marked still by the wound of the dog's teeth. Why did I not advertise, you ask, monsieur?—Ciel! because my bird was clearly wary, clever and I wanted him to be lulled into false security and think the police had given up in despair, after nearly a year.

I was unremitting in my cautious inquiries and watchful search, continually changing my disguises (mostly masculine, of necessity), and invariably armed with a loaded revolver for self-defence or to prevent the bird's escape. I am a dead shot and can hit where I will, I may assert. Day and night until quite

late I was abroad, here, there and everywhere—in public resorts, public vehicles, great thoroughfares, east, west, north and south. I haunted the gambling resorts, from the West End proprietary club to the low "hell"—all en garçon, of course. How could I get the entré of some of these, you say, madame? Ha, ha, that was easily enough managed with money, and I am an accomplished gambler—to be au fait in that line was part of my training.

But day after day, week after week, passed, and I was still baffled. I got not one clue, and at last, just before Christmas, I wrote to my chef: "Even I am almost in despair that 'L.S.' is either dead, or at the Antipodes. If I learn nothing by December 31st, I fear I must resort to the desperate measure of advertising; I am mad at failing, and more, my whole soul and brain are wrapped up in this case."

That letter reached Paris a few days before Christmas.

On the 24th of December, all day, I had detectives watching the great stations for any man answering to such description as I had, as the assassin might possibly spend the festive season out of town. I myself was about the West End in the evening, dressed much as I am now, in black, with a dark fur toque.

I gave a look over Paddington Terminus, and about ten o'clock I thought I would return to my lodging in Bloomsbury, and there decide on my further action to-night, or whether I should rest—that is, if I could. It was the very anniversary of the tragedy I was to unravel—Christmas Eve. I was beginning to feel the long heavy strain on mental and physical powers, I suppose, and every nerve was strung up to a high nervous tension. I felt in a curious unaccountable manner that would not be shaken off. I stepped into a City-going omnibus, sitting down by the door and instinctively taking notice of the other passengers—only two stout old men at the far end—for it was a bitterly cold night, with a heavy snow-laden sky, dreary enough to make one lonely and miserable under any circumstances. I was both. Yet, withal, as we started eastwards, there began to steal over me, an odd internal excitement, as of a vague expectancy, a restlessness, and intensified desire to gain my end, which became almost agony in its passionate vividness. It seemed to grip me, thrall my very soul, like a visible force. God of Justice! was there nothing above or below that knew the dread secret I sought? No power—seen or unseen—from whence my inmost being could draw the knowledge of that one man's hiding-place? What, too, was my chef thinking of his trusted agent, on whose success he had flung his whole credit? What on this dread night were the feelings of her relations, that their beloved dead was still unavenged? In those moments I felt half maddened with longing, and then in and through that longing there grew a strange sensation, as if something—I knew not what—went out from me, taking my life from me, then seeming to draw back with it in returning something that I could not grasp or define—that I never shall be able to define—but made me, with a sort of sudden mental wrench, look up, impelled by a force quite outside myself, to see sitting opposite to me a lady, young and lovely, dressed in handsome mourning.

How and when had she got in? Had the omnibus stopped or even slackened, unnoticed by me, in my strange absorption? No, no, how could it? yet there the stranger sat. And what a singular face it was! What deathly pallor and painful melancholy in every line! What sad, wistful eyes, that seemed full of unshed tears, and kept looking, looking at me, through me, into my soul, with an intense strained gaze that never wavered, and seemed every moment to grow deeper in its dumb agony of appeal as of one struggling for the speech of which God had bereft her tongue.

I looked away, aside, out of the doorway, conscious that my blood was creeping dull and heavily, like half-frozen water, through my veins; but a strange, weird fascination compelled me to again meet that gaze. Did she know me? Impossible! had certainly never seen her before. My heart throbbed up into my throat, my blood began to beat fast and warm again, and as we rolled onwards I was aware of a curious subtle change in my sensations. Every nerve, every fibre was still strung up to a painful tension; but there stole over me, into me, body and spirit, a sense of steel-like strength—a strange settling down of my faculties into cool, steadfast power, and more than that, a sense that grew slowly to impelling conviction that that fellow passenger knew what I did not-whosoever or whatsoever she was, and that my movements must follow hers, blindly. that odd feeling deepened and possessed me, my eyes again went to the woman's face—to meet a look of intense restfulness and content that dominated all other expression of anguish or strained eagerness as, if after something unreached. Did she—or—It—read my soul and find there all its tortured, trammelled spirit sought?

at her

It gave me almost a shock to suddenly see the stalwart, prosaic conductor at the doorway asking for "fares to Tottenham Court Road," which I had named when I got in. I noticed at once that he did not even glance at my strange neighbour—seemed not to see her—but I saw her shake her head to me.

"No," I said to the man, "I am going further. I'll stop you when I want to get out."

Under this curious calm that had settled on me, I was not at all surprised at the man's evident obliviousness of that passenger. I should have been surprised if he had evinced any knowledge of her presence, and it seemed to me quite in the order of things when, on reaching Gray's Inn Road, she raised her white hand to me, and glided out on to the pavement unnoticed by the conductor. I paid him and stepped to the stranger's side, thrilled right through with a weird feeling that should ordinarily unnerve one; yet I had never felt more strong, cool, ready for the most desperate danger or emergency; and as my guide—I following moved swiftly along northwards I drew off my gloves and felt in my bosom to be sure the revolver was ready to hand. There was grim work, I knew. She led on straight up past the shops, still ablaze at past eleven in that neighbourhood on this eve, and at last turned down a street which I knew to be mostly filled with third-rate, shady lodging-houses, where doors are on the latch all night, and never a question is asked of "whence, whither or what?" This class of houses have the commonest latch-locks that are easily fitted, and, of course, I was well provided with such appliances of noiseless entrance.

Before one of these houses my mysterious guide stopped. Save a light in the first floor window all was darkness—either the inmates were asleep or out. To that window my guide eagerly pointed, with a look and gesture that vehemently urged instant action, as if a minute's delay were fatal; so I drew out and fitted a key. She was close, her lips moved, but there was no sound, not a whisper; yet into my mind, as if I had heard it, came a name—Louis Saumarez—and at that moment I opened the door and entered, leaving the door just ajar for her to follow. But she did not. What I meant to do or felt I never could put into words. My mind was concentrated on one great fact—that the murderer was in that lighted room, about to escape, and that I—a woman, alone must stop him and arrest him.

Terror, danger, were not present to me then—I was too strung up—grimly cool. It was I who was dangerous. I stole up quietly, easily, as if I had a right there, opened that door and paused.

One glance took in the *mise-en-scène*. A shabby room, scantily furnished, a fire nearly out, wine and food on the table, a valise packed up, and just drinking a glass of wine, using the left hand, was a rather tall, good-looking, but sallow-faced man. Mon Dieu! I must see that other hand by some *ruse*.

"Que Diable," said I, with a bitter but abandoned kind of manner, "but you are a cruel enough lover to me, M. Saumarez."

He swung round, so startled that he staggered and caught at a chair with the right hand, to which it was nearest. I saw it full under the lamplight; a dark scar across it; the fourth finger gone! The assassin at last!

"Who the devil are you?" he demanded savagely, recovering himself a little. "I never saw you before, and you are too damned handsome to be forgotten. Leave my room! I have to catch a train, and my name is Mercier."

"Pardons, Monsieur," said I coolly, my right hand on the butt of my weapon, my eyes on his ready for his attack, "you are Louis Saumarez, and you—are—my prisoner for murder."

I stood near the door, he at the far end of the large room. At the last awful word, he snatched a knife from the table with a fierce "Sacre—r," and sprang towards me; but at that second I fired, and the fellow reeled back with a yell like a wounded wild beast, and fell heavily, partially stunned by the blow to his head, on the floor, the blood coming from his side. I knew where to hit safely. I was turning quickly to get police help before my prisoner regained consciousness, when men's steps came quickly along from below, up the stairs, and two constables came into the room, one exclaiming:

"Hulloa! What's this—murder? Are you hurt too, ma'am?"

Shaken now a little, I had leaned against the wall, as the other man knelt beside Saumarez.

"Non, non," I said. "I fired in self-defence. I am here to arrest that man for the murder of Madame Folcade. I am a French police agent. It is all right."

One was a sergeant, and whilst the other bound up the slight

wound, I briefly explained matters and gave my captive in charge. The sergeant sent for the divisional surgeon, who had Saumarez removed to the hospital—in custody, of course—and said in two or three days he would be able to be taken to Bow Street for the necessary formalities of extradition. After we had left him at the hospital, with the constable in charge, I asked the sergeant, as we walked back westward, how they arrived so opportunely—had they heard the shot and cry?

"Yes—just outside," he said; "but they had come from the station near at the summons of a lady in black, who was as white as a ghost, and was dumb, for she could only beckon—beckon like mad, and when we followed led us to that house—just as the shot was fired—and was gone before we could look round. Awful queer, ma'am," he added. "Who was she?"

"I do not know," I answered in a choked voice. "Good-night, I am dead tired now."

I was shaken to the centre now that the terrible, long strain was so far over, and the murderer secured; but next day, Christmas Day, I wired to my chef, and received a reply that he would send over a responsible official with a mandat d'arrêt to receive the prisoner from the English authorities and bring him over to Paris. Meanwhile, I of course had to obtain at Bow Street a warrant under the Extraditions Act, and two days later Saumarez was pronounced quite able to be removed. As a result—well, within five or six days of his arrest he was safely lodged in the Parisian prison. I had travelled with my French comrades (two of course) and their captive, who had maintained a sulky silence save once—to savagely curse that "diablesse of an agent."

I went the same day of our arrival to report myself to my delighted chef, who asked how I had trapped the bird at last? I felt too shattered then to tell him the actual truth, I shrank in sensitive dread from the possible smile of incredulity, so I said that a person I met by chance had spoken of a Frenchman named Saumarez who had one finger gone, and this person had shown me his lodgings, which he was on the point of leaving when I entered.

"So I had to be summary in my actions," I added, as I rose to go.

"Quite right, Marie, you are invaluable and have well redeemed my confidence in you. You have earned a rest truly, and a reward from M. Folcade. By the way, I have made a promise there for you."

"Comment, Monsieur?"—I was surprised—"my existence is unknown to him and his."

"Individually, yes, but professionally, not so. I went myself to tell M. Folcade of the daring arrest of the assassin by my clever agent—a woman, I added, and he made me promise to send you to his house here in Paris directly you arrived. He and his sister-in-law, the wife's twin-sister, especially wish to see the lady of whom I spoke."

I started, but said quietly:

"The twin-sister, Monsieur, is she then over here?" For though outwardly not a muscle of mine moved, I was startled right through by his words, by the wildly extraordinary fancy that flashed across me as I recalled all that had taken place on Christmas Eve.

"Yes," Dupré replied, "Mademoiselle Clarice Grey came over here to her bereaved brother-in-law just before Christmas; she was too ill to bear the voyage earlier. Will you have a fiacre and go at once, mon agent?"

"Yes, assuredly," I said. I felt that I must go at once and solve this mystery, which was surely on the borderland of the real and unreal, the seen and the wondrous unseen, of which our finite humanity, the soul's prison, knows so little and conjectures so much.

I went then to the banker's house, but found that he himself was not yet returned from the bank, though momentarily expected. "Would I see Mademoiselle Clarice?" I said yes, gave my name, and was shown into an elegant salon.

In three minutes a young lady came in, and in that moment as we faced each other we both stood transfixed, dazed—as if pulsation itself were arrested—each had seen the other, each knew where, but not how—not how;—my strange silent, fellow-passenger and guide of Christmas Eve, no flesh and blood, as this was who now came slowly forward and held my hands tightly—but, the same identity—only that other was in the spirit.

"We know each other," she said, in a hushed, awed way, "not in the flesh but in the soul, and yet a reality, not a dream, though they say I lay like one dead asleep, and when I came back to sentient life knew nothing of where we—she and I—had been."

"We-you and she!" I repeated, feeling my flesh creep and

my heart stand still. "There—there were not two but one guide with me."

"We, twain but always one," Clarice said in the same way, her wistful eyes looking into mine—"dead and living, our twinborn souls are one identity for ever, and so the dread secret with which her soul was oppressed, passed with it into mine, but densely trammelled by my mortality till your despair and strength of purpose and desire drew us from our mortal prison to your aid. I felt the mighty spell of your agony enfolding itself with my own maddened thirst for justice, felt a strange oblivion stealing my physical senses, and knew no more, save when I awoke, a deep joy, gratitude, triumph—a restfulness. I knew before your chef spoke that the murderer was arrested by the agent he named, it all came back to me then, and I—we twain knew all."

I stood looking at her as her mystic presence that night had looked at me. What awesome secret of the unknown was indeed half unfolded it seemed, in these twin-born sisters whom even the mystery of death could not part from their entwined co-existence? Had, in truth, the dead sister's soul passed as it were into its twin soul yet encompassed by its mortal body, and so through its own beyond death, knowledge, God-given yet only "through a glass darkly," had a mystic power as the one spirit of the Twin-Identity to guide me, the mortal agent who was the material instrument of God's justice? It might be so. Could I —could any mortal in his bounded finiteness say it could not be? So there must it rest as mystery till all mysteries shall be seen face to face

You ask me "What was the end of that grim tragedy?" Well—I traced out Saumarez's antecedents and my suspicions of his motive proved to be true. His guilt was undeniable by the proofs we had—the ring, the finger and knife and many other collateral links of evidence, and Louis Saumarez was condemned and guillotined.

It was months before I could work again, and indeed M. Folcade and Clarice Grey would have had me retire on the competence they insisted on settling on me, but I could not settle to a quiet, useless life whilst I was young and strong. So I am still agent-de police, and I am going to visit Clarice in London, where she is married to an Englishman. Ah, see, the train is going on again and we shall soon reach London. Clarice likes her chère Marie Lacroix "to be with her on Christmas Eve."

Miss May's Guest.

By NORA VYNNE.

Author of "The Admiral's Good-nature," "Honey of Aloes," "Generosity," &c.

BEATRICE MAY had been to a very "smart" party, and was walking home to save her cab fare. She went to all the smart parties because she was a very charming girl, well-known in artistic society for her crisp, vivacious little landscapes, and in the society that, though not artistic in itself, loves art and artists, for her pretty face and good spirits; and she was walking home to save a cab fare, because she had very little money to spare, and moreover, to-night she had broken out into the wild extravagance of a cold roast chicken for tea, and wanted to make up for it. It was far too cold to think of going home by bus.

It was the coldest evening of all the cold winter; the wind seemed armed with steel knives; it rushed spitefully through the streets, and flinging itself furiously on the few hardy enough to brave it, found out all the weak places in their armour in a trice. It seized the man with the weak heart, and, shrieking, "this is the way I kill such as you," froze up what little vitality he had. It shook the man of feeble chest, and crying, "Here is your vulnerable spot—here, here," sent him home to cough and gasp for breath all through the long night. It set its sharp teeth in among the nerves of the weakly, the famished, and the old, and danced devil's dances there.

It didn't hurt Beatrice May to any great extent, for she was a vigorous, healthy young girl, with a constitution that defied even such a wind as this; but it lashed her insteps and her ankles, crept down between her hair and the collar of her coat, raced up her cuffs at the wrists, and froze her hands dead in her muff.

So when she reached the baked-potato man, who has his stand at the corner of the Earl's Court Road, she stopped to buy two-pennyworth of hot potatoes, with the double purpose of warming her hands on them, and supplementing the chicken.

She stood blinking at the red glare of the stove, noticing how cold her very eyes felt as the lids closed over them; and while the potato man, frozen into indifference even of this unusually interesting customer, was languidly choosing out such potatoes

as were sufficiently cooked, she noticed a man standing near looking at the fire.

He was too far off to be feeling any warmth from it; he was only staring at it in a dull, apathetic way, as if finding some slight relief in the mere sight of it. He seemed absolutely in the very last stage of cold and hunger. He was standing with his long thin arms wound round his body as far as they would go, his lank black hair falling round his grey, attenuated face, which was thrust deep down into the collar of his tightlybuttoned ragged coat; he had the air of holding himself together for want of something to lean against. He looked at Beatrice with the same dull, apathetic stare as he looked at the fire—both were too far off to affect him personally, but still, merely as a reminder that such things yet were in the world, were faintly pleasant to him. Looking at him, Beatrice felt that if she had not worked hard for the food she carried, and every article of the warm clothing she wore, she should have been ashamed of possessing them.

She had been putting the potatoes into her muff mechanically—they would not all go in, the potato-man was offering her the last two.

"No, they don't matter—I have enough; give those to our poor friend there."

The man looked up; looked at her, not at mere life and beauty in the abstract, a part of the moving background of that little spot of red light, the little show of warmth that was his last comfort, but at her personally, as a woman who required an answer of him.

"Thank you. There is really no reason why you should give me potatoes, but I am very much obliged to you."

The voice was quiet and well-bred, past all question the voice of a gentleman—her equal—her brother. No, not her brother because her equal, but because of the pain and pride in his face; because, young and healthy and happy as she was, she felt their common kinship to sorrow and death; because, had a persistent run of ill-luck made her as poor as he, had the cold pierced her through, and hunger pinched her features as sharp as his, she too would have found the humiliation of taking careless alms from a stranger more bitter even than cold or hunger. She looked at him and shivered, feeling for the moment all he felt; then she spoke again, impulsively, as was her habit.

"See here, my friend, you want more than a couple of potatoes; I shall be so pleased if you will come home to tea with me. You will—will you not?"

"You are very good. I will come with pleasure."

The words were spoken with the mechanical courtesy of habit. The man was far too cold to feel any emotion, even the feeble emotion of surprise, but he made an effort, unknotted his arms, raised his head—as it were, gathered his bones together and shook them into place—and moved with Beatrice down the street.

The potato man stared after the two amazed; he thought it all very improper, unless, indeed, this well-dressed lady was a little mad.

But Beatrice was not mad, only very Bohemian; perhaps in her heart she was a little amazed at herself, but she was far too kindly-natured to insult her guest by showing embarrassment now her invitation had been accepted. She went on talking pleasant commonplace till they reached her rooms, well aware that her companion was not listening, but to avoid an awkward silence. She carefully refrained from asking him any questions. Indeed, his faculties were so benumbed with the cold that he could not have answered her if she had questioned him. He only knew that he had ceased dying of cold for the moment, that a sweet and gracious woman was talking to him, and that presently he should have something to eat; but the instinct of good manners helped him every now and then to say something vaguely appropriate in answer to her.

"I live here," she said, as they reached a neat little block of red flats. "I am on the third floor. We will go up slowly, because I can see you are ill."

"Thank you."

They went up the dimly-lighted stairs very slowly indeed. Beatrice would have liked to have offered him her arm, but, seeing him half stretch his hand to pull himself up by the banisters, and then draw it back and take the wall side to leave the banisters for her, she refrained. When they reached the third floor, and Beatrice opened her door, a little rush of warm air came out into the cold to welcome them. The man gave a low, half-articulate murmur of pleasure, and bent forward eagerly towards it, as if his unsteady feet could not take him into the warmth quick enough; they went in together.

"Ah, my gas stove is such a comfort to me," she said.

"Before I had it, I used to have to light my fire when I came in, in the evenings, and sometimes it would not light, now this is all I have to do."

Threading her way across the almost dark room, she knelt down in front of the stove and turned on the gas to the full, so that the little blue line of light along the bottom bar sprang up in yellow flame, and curling among the asbestos globes in the grate turned them all bright red. He could see his way now, and, with the same little murmur of pleasure, made a few steps towards the fire, blinking his deep-set eyes, and pushing the lank black hair off his face with both hands.

"Take this chair," said Beatrice, when he reached her. "Wheel it a little nearer the fire, please, and then it won't be in my way while I am getting tea ready. I call it tea because it would be absurd to call a meal dinner when I get it ready myself, and we don't dress for it; but I always want something substantial at this hour, and if you would rather consider it dinner, we can have claret instead of coffee—only I am afraid it is rather bad claret, and I pride myself on making good coffee. Here is a newspaper, so that I need not feel I am leaving you unentertained, while I 'fly round,' as the Americans say."

All this was said by snatches, and unconsciously rather than deliberately, with an intention of putting her guest at his ease. His mind was still too benumbed to take in the meaning of any separate sentence; but the general effect of them all was warming and soothing, in keeping with the pretty room, the fire and the light, and the prospect of getting something to eat. He felt, rather than understood, that she had invited him to her house in a spirit of comradeship, not of charity, that he was her guest, not her *protegé*—was entertained, not relieved.

He did not read the paper; he watched her over the edge of it, as she moved quickly about the room, and in and out of it. There was not much to do apparently; she had put on a kettle, and brought in a tray of tea things, taken the potatoes out of their dirty skins and put them before the fire to brown, and lit two lamps, one with a cream-coloured shade, and one with a red one, and now, standing before a little glass, just where the two lights met in amber, she pulled off her hat and coat, and passed her hand once or twice through her hair.

Then she drew up a big Japanese screen, to shut off the colder

end of the room, and enclose all the warmth and light round the table. Last of all she made the coffee, and at the fragrance of it her guest's frozen faculties began to wake at last.

"I ought to have been helping you all this while," he said.

"You ought if you had not been ill; that is why I did not ask you. Besides, you don't know where anything is kept, so you could not have helped me much. I say, you know—shall you be shocked if I own to keeping brandy in my rooms? A little brandy and water, before we begin tea, or dinner, or whichever it is, would be so good for you."

"A dessert spoonful of brandy in a little milk would be better, if I might have that."

It pleased her that her guest should know exactly what he wanted and ask for it without hesitation; she had the brandy and milk ready for him in a couple of seconds, then they drew the table close to the fire, and, being both very hungry, didn't talk much for the next few minutes. It hurt Beatrice at first to see her starved guest struggling to eat like a gentleman, and not like a wolf; it was horrible to see a face as delicate and intellectual as was his, fairly glow with the joy of merely feeding; she felt to the very depth of her heart the agony of hunger he must have undergone.

But presently the pain of hunger being appeased, he surrendered himself to the pleasure of it, that is, he ceased to be a starved man, and was only a man with a remarkably good appetite, so they began to talk.

Beatrice wondered a little what was the most suitable topic of conversation for a hostess to start, when her guest was a beggarman off the street, for while it was difficult to find a subject equally interesting to both of them, to talk about himself would be as bad as questioning him, and to talk about herself would seem like hinting that she expected him to do the same; but she had her visitor and was bound to entertain him, so she began with a few words about her art. He was quite ready for her.

"Are those your work?" he asked, speaking in a tone that suggested that he hoped she would say no, and glancing at the framed watercolours and crayons hung round the room.

"Oh yes, my School of Art work," she said, with a great deal of scornful apology for them in her tone. "The sort of things they give us to do by way of curing us of any originality or feeling we may have. I don't work like that now."

- "No, I don't think you do," he said laughing.
- "How do you mean?"

"Well, that was the sort of work you did when you were 'a very good girl,' according to other people's standards; when you always did what you were told, or what other people did; before it occurred to you to think for yourself, act for yourself, and be a good girl, from your own standard. 'Make your soul,' to use a phrase, instead of trying to get it ready-made from a general dealer's. Judging from the little I have seen of you, I should say you were an impressionist now."

"I am," she cried, "heart and soul; that is, I try to draw what I see and feel, and not treat life as mere freehand ornament, more or less projected. May I show you some of my work? Will it bore you?" And starting from her seat she brought forward a big portfolio, and leant it up against the table.

They looked at the sketches slowly, talking and drinking coffee the while, he praising some frankly, and criticising others just as frankly. He did not know much of painting, of the technique that is, but he showed very intelligent ignorance.

"Ah, this is good," he said. "Wait, I think I understand it—Morris, is it not?"

He held a little picture of a fiercely-lighted eastern landscape, with a little indistinct group of armed riders, like the shadow of a cloud blown across it; she looked over his shoulder at the sketch.

"I saw the trees in the hot bright weather, Clear cut with shadows 'very black."

she quoted. "Yes, it is Morris; do you think I have caught it?"

"Yes. You have got the absolute stillness of noon on to your
ten inches of paper; a stillness these fellows riding emphasise
rather than disturb, just as a train, so far off it seems to only
creep along the hillside, emphasises the stillness of the Worcestershire hills. Have you ever noticed, by the way, that noon is
the only time that ever is still? People talk about the 'hush of
evening,' but there isn't any 'hush.' All nature is skurrying
home to bed, it is like the suburbwards flight of cabs from.

Piccadilly Circus on a different scale. There is such a rising
of mists, and falling of dew, and shutting up of leaves, and
crouching together of grasses, that one can't be quiet; one can
hear the night coming on, but the noonday is absolutely still.

If I were a ghost, I would choose the noonday, and not the night to revisit the world."

"I've noticed it," she said. "I was staying at a country house in the summer. It was a very high house, and I was at the top of it, and I used to lean out of the window at night, and listen to the grass and leaves folding themselves up for the night. One evening I had such a headache that I could not sleep, so I got out on the parapet, and heard the dew falling below me. It was quite dry, high up, where I was, but below the dew was almost like a rain. There were two people in the garden walking up and down and talking, I could see they were talking, but the rustling of the dew between us shut off their voices, and made it seem like a ghost's pantomime; it was one of the most unearthly things I ever witnessed. I made a sketch of it, but the perspective is all raving mad. See."

"An impressionist heart and soul," he said. "Yes, indeed you are; these two doubtless eminently earthly persons look so like ghosts playing at an earthly flirtation that your picture gives one a sensation something like the end of a cold knitting needle drawn down one's back. Are you sure they were earthly people now? You look like a person who would see ghosts?"

"Oh, yes," she said laughing, "there was nothing ghostly about them, only about my view of them."

"I knew you were an impressionist before I saw your work, you know," he went on. "That is why I doubted if those things on the wall were yours; and I should imagine it goes all through you, tastes and feelings and all. You read Pater, don't you?—and Daudet?—especially his shorter sketches. Tourgenieff too, I fancy, even at the risk of depression."

"Tourgenieff breaks my heart," she said; "but I suppose if he didn't it would be because I did not understand him, so I go on reading."

"Take Gyp for comfort, and still go on reading," he said, "your heart will be none the worse in the end, the very end, I mean."

They had closed the portfolio, and pushed away the table by this time. She took a tobacco-pouch from the mantelshelf and began to make cigarettes; he watched her curiously.

"You allow it?" he asked as, the first cigarette being made, she passed it to him.

"Of course, this is Bohemia; haven't you been there before?"

"I have been in many strange places."

"Ah, and I live in Bohemia. I like it, I am not afraid of it, or of any one I meet there."

She turned straight towards him, an unlighted cigarette in her fingers; he leant forward in his chair, looking at her over his tightly folded arms.

"I protest against that aggressive tone," he said, laughing a little. "I don't deserve it, nor you don't need it; you will not be misunderstood in Bohemia, or anywhere else."

She laughed.

"I beg your pardon, you did not deserve it. You have rebuked one of my worst habits. I have an irritating tendency to always stand on my defence. The fact is, I know in my heart, though you may not, that I am rather a dreadful sort of person. I shock most people and distress the rest. I am a perpetual grief to my friends."

The laugh died out as she ended, died down rather, to a smile that was half-scornful, half pathetic. At that moment the doorbell rang and the smile became almost a sneer.

"Here is another visitor," she said.

She opened the door, and stepped back instantly, letting the new visitor follow her into the room; a man, young, and fairly good-looking, clean-shaven, and with very well-cut features. He was dressed almost fatiguingly well, and an air of almost supercilious prosperity seemed to come into the room with him, and permeate the atmosphere. In his presence the other man's forgotten wretchedness came back on him with a rush; his poverty, his rags, his dirt, overwhelmed him. He was no longer the welcome guest, the sympathetic critic of this sweet, bright girl, but a beggar from the street, fed from charity.

There was a painful silence for a second, then Beatrice spoke.

"Come in, Bert, come nearer the fire; this is a friend of mine, I asked him in to tea. Don't look so astonished; you should know by this time that I have lots of friends besides yourself.

It was small wonder if "Bert," was looking astonished to see this ragged, unkempt, uncanny man so thoroughly at home and happy in a lady's room; but called to himself, answered readily enough, in what might be called an "elegant" voice:

"Was I looking astonished? I don't know why. You are rather an astonishing person as a rule, but there is nothing surprising in your having friends to see you." This was pretty well for a man taken so completely aback as Rupert Sendal had been; but the other guest, still flushed and shamed, looked at Beatrice with an appeal that had something of reproach in it. She responded instantly:

"Oh, he isn't an interloper," she said with a sort of off-hand graciousness, and indicating Sendal with a little backward motion of her head. "He is a friend of mine, and very nice, really. Don't disturb yourself for him, I never do. He isn't nearly so prosperous as he looks—fortunately. In Bohemia we are all bankrupt alike; it is only a matter of degree. Indeed, I fancy he is the worst off of the three, for he is in debt; you and I are spared that calamity, having no credit. I don't know how he gets it; I fancy it is his cuffs. Those cuffs inspired me with a simply awful respect for him at first. The tradesmen see those immaculate cuffs, and fancy they mean a conscience, and a banking account to match. Poor tradesmen—it's pathetic!"

Sendal dropped into a chair, laughing. If she meant this rattle of nonsense to stand instead of an introduction by name, he might as well accept it. Conversation would be difficult under the circumstances, but less difficult than turning aside one of Beatrice's eccentric moods. She was a dear girl. It was a pity, perhaps, that she did not behave better; but then, if she did, she would be so much less amusing. As it was, it was so deliciously impossible to know what she would do or say next.

"I don't know," he said lazily; "I don't know but what in the interests of abstract justice, and from a purely impersonal point of view, I ought not to protest against such a description of myself. It's picturesque, but incomplete."

Beatrice was pleased. Her second guest so far admitted equality with the first that he desired to defend himself before him. She was so pleased with Sendal for following her lead that she spoke his defence herself.

"Oh, it is not his fault, he wouldn't deceive anybody, not even a tradesman to any great extent; it is quite unconscious, this habit of looking prosperous. He began life as a 'gilded idler,' you know—'heir of millions,' and that sort of thing, only another heir turned up, one of those superfluous people who always do turn up—the world is full of superfluous people—and now though he has got into the way of not having any money, he hasn't got into the way of looking as if he had none. I have; but women are so much more adaptable than men."

"I don't know but what it's good training," said Sendal reflectively; "to be brought up to the knowledge of how pleasant a thing money is, just as an incentive to make it; it appeals to one's sense of logic."

"Yes," said the ragged man bitterly. "Send your son to college to learn extravagant habits, and then turn him adrift to support them. It's his own fault if he doesn't make money, you have shown him how necessary it is."

"Your case?" asked Sendal; he too felt somewhat nearer the man when he had heard his voice.

"Mine? Oh no, I was thinking of another man, a man I don't know. I was brought up abroad myself. It will always be a matter of regret to me that I was not at Oxford. One makes friends there—one makes friends."

He leaned back loosely in his chair. A look of actual sorrow rose in his eyes, as if he were regretting the friends he had not made. Neither of the others saw the effort it was costing him—had been costing him all the evening—to speak coherently, because the effort had been made so bravely. Beatrice, who had been making more cigarettes, offered one to Sendal.

"Thanks," he said lazily, and lighting it from hers; then to the other man, "We all smoke here you see. Are you tolerant of it?"

"Oh yes. God having made a good thing, I should think it not only selfish but profane to turn to the woman and say, 'He made it for me, but not for you.'"

"But it's not a good thing; it's a 'pleasant vice,' and we men naturally object to women sharing the pleasant vices with us. Haven't we generously given them all the unattractive vices to their share? Why won't they leave us in peace with those from which we can extract a little pleasure? But I see it is no use arguing, she has converted you already."

Beatrice looked up, with the same pathetic sneer on her lips.

"He is one of the friends I distress," she said. "I distress him very much."

"Are you distressing him to-night?"

"Oh, I always distress him, but he manages to tolerate me. He would have liked me much better when I painted those," with a gesture towards the School of Art work on the walls.

"My dear child!"

The tone was full of such deep and violent protest that all three laughed, and Beatrice explained. "Oh, I don't mean for a moment that you like them, you are far too cultured not to admire the right thing; but you would have admired the state of soul that painted them, and now I couldn't get back to it, even if I would, I am such a Bohemian."

"You are," said Sendal, "Bohemian from the furthest reach of your soul to the deepest depth of your heart."

The ragged guest spoke absently, as if thinking aloud:

" And that's a great length."

"Yes?" It was an interrogation, and the other answered.

"I mean she has a very wide soul, and a very large heart."

"Yes."

It was simple agreement this time; he looked at the girl curiously for a moment, as if studying her afresh. It occurred to him that he would very much like to get her out of the room for a moment or two and kiss her. (He didn't put it quite this way for himself; he said, get some explanation of the strange man's presence). So he asked if he was not to have any coffee.

She laughed an apology for not having offered him any sooner, and suggested that he should go to the kitchen and get the materials, since he knew quite well where they were kept.

He went obediently; they heard him grinding vigorously at the coffee-mill; presently he called to her that he could not find any milk.

She laughed again, understanding perfectly well what he wanted. He might have had the kiss, and welcome, but she was not going to give any explanation of her guest's presence that he did not hear, or that would pain him if he did hear it, so calling back directions where the milk was to be found, she went on talking.

Sendal, coming back with the milk and the ground coffee, found the other two talking with animation. They had got back to art again, and "Rags," as he christened the other man in his mind, turned and brought him into the conversation as easily and naturally as if he had had ten thousand a year, and had looked as if he had it.

The evening passed very pleasantly for all three after that. Once or twice in the course of it, it occurred to Sendal that the girl's standard of conduct was something infinitely higher and grander than his own rule of behaviour. He began to wonder what he had ever found to tolerate in her.

At last a loud clock, somewhere in the neighbourhood, struck eleven, and each of the three recognised, with a start, that a very pleasant evening was over.

They all three stood up. A troubled look rose in Beatrice's eyes. It was as if she, on the open sea, but knowing her way well, and in a strong boat, had seen some weak swimmer struggling in the water, had brought him into her boat, and kept him safe, but when night came on, being without a chaperone, had thrown him back into the sea to drown.

The perplexity on her face deepened into resentment as she looked at Sendal, as if he, being the advocate of conventionality, were responsible for it. He saw her hand slip to her side, and stop short, and knew she was wondering if she might offer her guest money for a night's lodging, but shrank from the coarseness of it.

The ragged guest was speaking in an absolutely conventional tone, there was even an absence of the gratitude that would have made his dismissal difficult in it.

"We have stayed an unconscionable time; you have been very good to us. I have not spent such a pleasant evening for a long while, I only hope we have not tired you. Good-night."

It was impossible for her to offer this man money. It was as if the rescued man, quietly accepting the inviolable laws of society, had cheerfully taken his hat, bowed, and dropped back into the sea to drown.

"You will come with me to-night won't you?" Sendal said with real cordiality in his tone; "we have not half had our talk out, but we can't go on talking here, because Miss May always turns her visitors out when it gets late."

"Thank you, I shall be very pleased."

He spoke mechanically, looking the while at Beatrice, as if accepting the favour solely from her. Sendal, too, looked to her for the recognition of it. The two men said good-night and left the room together.

It was horribly cold on the landing when the door was shut behind the two men; "Rags" turned and watched the gleam of light they could still see through the glass above the doorway disappear as the inner door was shut; even then he made no movement to go down-stairs, but stood leaning against the rail shivering.

"I shall never see her again."

- "Oh, nonsense," said Sendal genially; "Miss May is not the sort to lose sight of a friend. You will come with me to-night, and to-morrow you will tell us all about yourself, at least all that concerns us—what you have done, and what you can do, you know, and we will see what can be arranged for you."
 - "You are engaged to her?"
 - "Yes."
 - "Do you love her as she deserves?"
- "I think I do; because I know now that until to-night I have not."

His words surprised himself; what had come over him that he could speak such a truth to a stranger! The day before he could not have done it, two hours ago he could not have done it, but whatever had caused the change, he knew that it was for the better, and had "come to stay."

They had gone down the first flight of stairs, and now Ragshad stopped again, with his hand on the rail, and was looking back at the closed door.

- "I would die for her."
- "You would not be the only one who would do so much," said: Sendal.
- "Yes. That's nothing—means nothing—tells nothing. I would give my very soul into her hands—I shall never see her again.
- "That's a little superlative, isn't it, for one evening's hospitality?"
- "It's not for that; it's not for what she did for me, but what she is that I love her."
 - "Love her?"
- "Why not? It can't hurt you. I'm not rivalling you, that's absurd on the face of it. I shall never see her again. How horribly cold it is."

They had got about half way down-stairs now, suddenly he stopped short again.

- "I don't quite know what I am saying. Have I said anything I should not—anything strange?"
- "Oh, lots of strange things, but nothing that one would say you should not. Why, what's the matter? Steady, hold on to me."

For the man's hold on the stair rail had relaxed, he leaned heavily against Sendal, his head drooping on his shoulder, his lips a little apart. "Hold on to me," said Sendal practically. "Don't be ill here, it is so late, and she lives alone you know. We ought not to have stayed so long—you ought not if you felt ill. Make an effort to get to my rooms, they are close by, we will send for a doctor if you want one when we get there. Don't let us alarm her to-night."

While he was speaking, he had thrown his arms round the man's thin, lank body, and dragged him down the stairs.

The open doorway showed a section of a drenched street, and black wind-tossed rain. Sendal supported his companion against the damp passage wall, while he whistled for a cab.

"It's horribly cold," he said, "how cold you are. Why did you not get nearer to the fire? We'll have some brandy and water when we get to my rooms. You don't think me a brute, I hope, for not taking you back inside; but she is all alone you see, and she never will think for herself, so we must think for her. You would not wish to distress her I know."

"Remember, I would come back from death to serve her."

The wind rushed wet and howling up the passage, mixing with the words, and carrying them away with it. Sendal shivered and shrank up against the wall, grumbling at the cold. The dim lights of the hansom were standing at the entry, the stopping of the wheels had been unhearable in the rain.

"Ah, at last," said Sendal. "Come on. Here, cabby, help me to get him in. You drivelling fool, what are you grinning for? He's not drunk I tell you, he's ill. Gently, don't haul him like that; do you think you have hold of a sack of sand? Be careful with that door, I don't want it on to his fingers, or mine either. Now, as quick as you like to Dennison Street, No. 19."

"Brutes, that they all are," said Sendal, half excusing to himself the anger he could not account for. "Did he hurt you? Don't trouble to speak though, till we get home, and you have some brandy—hot brandy." He said the words emphatically as if dwelling with pleasure on the thought of how hot it would be, and shivering, "What a night. This cab is wet through, and as cold as a grave. You shall be out of it in two minutes."

Sendal's rooms were on the ground floor, so it was easy to carry the man in; he was rather startled at having to do so, for it showed that the illness must be more serious than he had thought at first, and all the little incidents of the evening had filled him with an interest that was almost affection for this man.

He laid him on the sofa, and proceeded to hunt for the brandy bottle. Everyone seemed asleep in the house, but his fire was still alight; he stirred it into a blaze, and lit the gas. All the while the man on the sofa never moved.

Sendal came back to him with the brandy.

He was lying straight out on the sofa, his head thrown back on the cushions, his lank black hair falling from his face, his eyes wide open. The brandy Sendal tried to pour through his teeth trickled over his sunken cheek. The man was dead.

Sendal stood staring at him. The brandy was slowly dropping from his lips to the floor. Nothing gives one a more horribly complete realisation of death than the attempt to force the means of life through dead lips. It seems such a desecration to have troubled the dead with the needs of mortality any more—such an insult to their peace.

There was no room for a moment's doubt; this man was dead, past all aid, and he was alone with him. What was to be done next?

A doctor must come, of course, if only to certify that his aid was useless; and the police—in cases like this people always informed the police. It was the work of a moment to wake some inmates of the house, and send the necessary messages, he scarcely had to leave the room to do so; it scarcely interrupted his horrified contemplation of the dead man.

But there was something else to be done. Desolate as this man had seemed, there might still be some one whose right it was to come to him now, to care for him now, and take the ordering of what was to follow. He must find out if this were so.

He must search and find out all Beatrice had abstained from asking, and the man himself had chosen not to reveal. It was horrible. Another desecration; but it had to be done, and Sendal essayed to do it.

The secret, if it was a secret, was easily found. A packet of loosely folded letters lay in his coat pocket. Sendal opened the first.

It began "My dear son," and was signed with the name of his own father.

So this man was his brother, his elder brother, whose unex-

pected existence had come between him and fortune. His father's son by an earlier and unacknowledged marriage; the man Beatrice had jestingly described as a "superfluous person," and now he was dead.

His brother, his own brother, whom in the ordinary course of things he should have known and loved. He almost loved him now, as he lay there dead, his thin soiled hands stretched straight out, his face so thin and white, and with such a curious look of resolution on it.

What did it all mean? His father long ago had quarrelled with him, and had declared the existence of another son who of right was, and should be, his heir. How indignant he had been at the mere existence of this unacknowledged brother. Had he thought more kindly of the dispossessed brother? Was it on his own behalf this dead man had spoken so bitterly of the injustice of bringing a man up luxuriously, and leaving him to a life of struggling poverty? Was it himself he had regretted not having met at Oxford? Was it really too late for them to love each other?

The room was full of people now, all asking questions. He collected himself and answered them.

He did not see the need of bringing Beatrice into the affair, supposing it would only be a matter of a few necessary inquiries, so he simply said the man had seemed ill and destitute, so he had brought him home to see what could be done for him, not knowing who he was.

The inspector held out his hand for the letters.

- "You should not have touched these," he said.
- "Should not I? I wished to see if he had any friends I might send for."

The inspector was looking at the letters, and did not answer.

- "Wilfred Sendal," he read. "Is that his name?"
- "I presume so. Yes, I am certain of it."
- "Do you know the name?"
- "Yes. It is the same as my own—the surname at least. He is my half-brother?"
 - "Your half-brother?"

The inspector glanced at Sendal, then round the room, taking in every sign of comfort and luxury it contained, then at the ragged and starved body stretched out on the couch. Sendal answered the look. "I did not know him till I saw the letters. I never saw him to my knowledge before to-night. There were family reasons. It is a long story, and this is not the place to tell it. I cannot account for his condition; he was the heir to property worth half a million."

"Was the heir? Who inherits now?"

"My God, I do," cried Sendal, suddenly realising that it was so.

The doctor looked up suddenly.

"I can give no opinion as to how this man died," he said.

There was an instantaneous change in the manner of the inspector, and of every other person in the room.

"I am afraid this will be serious," said the inspector.

"There will be an inquest?" Sendal turned to the doctor.

"Certainly; I cannot give a certificate."

"Horrible."

He looked sadly at his dead brother; this was yet another desecration.

"I should wire to my father," he said, "but I don't know where he is."

"Your father is Jonas Sendal, of Sendal Court?"

"Yes, but he is never there. He is travelling."

The doctor looked at him gravely.

"Is it possible you do not know that he is dead?"

"Good God, no. How do you know it? Did you know him?"

"I knew of him, most people knew of him, as a great botanist and herbalist. His death was in the papers to-day."

"Impossible. What papers?"

"Several. The death of such a well-known scientist as Jonas Sendal could not pass unnoticed."

"I didn't see it. They should have sent me word."

"It is natural to suppose you would know."

"This is very serious indeed," said the inspector.

Sendal looked round the room at all the scared condemning faces.

"Speak out plainly," he said. "You mean?"

"His death is suspicious," said the inspector, "and you had a great deal to gain by it."

Sendal almost smiled as he looked at his dead brother. "Poor fellow, he didn't mean this. Well, sir, it seems idle, and an impertinence to myself to assure you you are mistaken."

- "I had better caution you—" began the inspector.
- "Oh yes, I know all about that. What am I to do?"
- "We shall have to trouble you to come with us."
- "And he?" with a glance towards the sofa.
- "My men will see to that matter."

Sendal took a step or two towards his dead brother. He had a strange longing to kiss him, only it seemed ridiculous—theatrical, before so many people. A man must be stirred so very far out of himself before he can kiss another man without awkwardness. A woman would have been different. Sendal had never hesitated about kissing women. Since he had had the right to kiss Beatrice he had wished with a painful regret that he had not kissed so many. He had a foolish fancy that if he were to kiss those dead lips his own would be purified by the touch, so that next time he could kiss Beatrice without self-reproach, but because of the absurdity of the idea he hesitated.

The doctor was looking at him curiously, and spoke with something of regret or apology in his tone.

- "I am very sorry for this. I must beg you to believe that I am only doing my duty."
 - "I am not questioning it."
- "And for your own sake it will surely be better that the matter should be thoroughly cleared up."
- "I quite agree with you. I am as puzzled as you are. I have certainly more to puzzle me. Any one who helps me to clear up this mystery lays me under an obligation; he was my brother though I did not know him."

And he fell to wondering what Beatrice would think of the whole affair.

Beatrice scarcely could think of it all as real at first, and yet it did not seem strange, or out of keeping that the incident of the past evening should have an unlikely and unconventional ending. She felt a sort of tender contempt for Gilbert's futile effort to keep her name out of the affair. She was sorry that she was to be stared at, questioned and discussed, her freshness and reservedness, her sanctity to him desecrated—her preciousness as a woman—deteriorated in his eyes by publicity—sorrier still, that in his eyes this would be so, but such as he was she loved him, so she forgave him, while she grudged that there should be anything to forgive.

She was a little late in reaching the town-hall where the

inquest was to be held; two or three people were gathered in the hall discussing the affair; she heard them saying that there would be no post mortem till after the inquest had been held as the inquest might go to show that a post mortem was unnecessary. Two or three men came out from a doorway on her left as she entered the room where the inquest was being held; they were talking about "the body."

Still it all seemed more a strange drama than a truth that behind that blank white wall that fronted her as she took her place, the man who had been her guest the evening before lay dead, that her lover was half-suspected of murdering him, and that it was to be left to that fussy, stupid-faced, coarse-handed coroner, and his ignorant jury, to say whether the suspicion should take definite form.

The coroner put on a pair of blue spectacles, and gave a little series of fat murmuring coughs. That seemed the signal for the commencement of the proceedings. The whimsical idea struck her that the coroner was surely not such a remarkably clear-sighted person that he need insist on examining the evidence through those gloomy blue glasses.

They were reading the letters found on the dead man, and could not make very much of them. They were the letters of an angry intolerant father, to an obstinate, and probably wrongheaded son, who apparently would not "give up" something or other. Something which the writer variously alluded to in a crescendo of violence from letter to letter as "nonsense," "infernal nonsense," and "damned nonsense." What the nonsense was the letters did not show, but it was clear that the father declined to give the son any assistance until he made some avowal, or disavowal of belief which the son declared he could not make conscientiously. It seemed at one time during the correspondence the son had turned defiant, for one of the letters taunted him with the fact that he could not raise money on post obits, for he could not prove his legitimacy without the writer's assistance, which he should not have. "You have no choice," the letter ended, "but to submit or starve."

Someone interrupted, saying that the letters threw no light on the cause of death, and was snubbed by the coroner for his pains, the letters at any rate proved the identity of the deceased.

Presently it was Beatrice's turn to be examined.

[&]quot;You are Beatrice May, an artist?"

- "Yes."
- "Any relation to the deceased?"
- " No."
- "Nor to his half-brother, Mr. Gilbert Sendal?"
- " No."

Gilbert was watching her, she felt it, though she shrank from looking in his direction, the coroner was still staring at her.

"I am engaged to him," she added proudly.

And Gilbert was proud of it too. Proud in her, and of her, proud that she should stand there before them all, for them to see what manner of woman she was, while she owned herself his; glad of her presence, grateful for her strength and sweetness, and the steadfast words that made him feel he was not alone among this crowd who doubted him. How blind he had been to the best of Beatrice all this while. It was pleasant to see her so clearly. He hoped he would not be hanged, but it was almost worth while to be hanged for the sake of understanding Beatrice so well.

The coroner was questioning her, but with perfect respect. "How was it she had asked an utter stranger to her rooms?" Because he seemed starving and hungry."

"No. She was not afraid of being robbed by the strange man, she might have been if she had stopped to think, but had thought of nothing but how hungry the man looked. She had not particularly expected to see Mr. Sendal to visit her that evening, but it would have made no difference if she had, she was always willing for him to call when her work was done."

Gilbert noticed how sensibly and emphatically she emphasised all the facts that told in his favour. She mentioned how Mr. Sendal had been surprised and half-annoyed to find she had offered hospitality to a stranger, how she had resisted his hints that she should give some explanation of the affair, how she had not introduced Mr. Sendal by name, because that would have entailed enquiry as to the dead man's name, and being sure he was in distress she had thought it might be painful to him to be made to declare himself, and how Mr. Sendal humoured her, and even invited her guest to go to his rooms for the night.

"Then you tell us?"—the coroner turned one blue disc on Beatrice and the other on Sendal in downright suspicion—"You tell us that Mr. Sendal asked this man to his rooms believing him to be an utter stranger?"

"Yes, he did it to please me."

It was said so simply, and so modestly, that there was not a man present who did not think the reason sufficient.

When Gilbert came forward to give his evidence the feeling of respectful confidence which Beatrice had evoked seemed still in the air, his examination went on smoothly enough at first.

The man was alive when they left Miss May's rooms; he had spoken on the stairway. No, not to reveal his identity, but simply in praise of, and gratitude for, Miss May's kindness. He had not complained outright of feeling ill, but had implied it, exclaiming, "I shall never see her again." Then he had fainted.

"Why had he not returned to Miss May's rooms for assistance?"

"Because it was late, and he did not wish to disturb or frighten Miss May."

"Did he not think that a very trivial reason, in the case of a lady of Miss May's courage and generosity?"

"Yes, he thought so now. He had thought otherwise at the time, from force of habit, and not realising how seriously ill the man was."

"You thought, in fact, of trivial conventionalities, which Miss May herself was too sensible and good to consider, while your own brother was dying?"

"I am ashamed to say that I did, but I had no more idea that he was dying than I had that he was my brother."

"You say he fell against you—helpless, into your arms on the way downstairs?"

"Yes."

"Did not that make you think him seriously ill?"

"Yes, but not dangerously. I thought he was simply overcome with fatigue, and the humiliation of his position, and——"Gilbert was losing his self-control somewhat as the scene came back to him. "He felt Miss May's conduct deeply; he was quite unmanned by it; he spoke strangely."

Beatrice, staring at the coroner, saw doubt of Gilbert's word in every line of his commonplace face, in the heavy mouth, the obstinate chin, in all the self-satisfied wrinkles round his eyes; only the blue spectacles were unmoved. She seemed to see it all happen, see her own landing—the fading light—and in the dark hear the two men talking about her.

The coroner was speaking.

- "Miss May told us that your invitation was given through her influence. Does that mean at her request?"
 - "No, but I knew that it would please her."
 - "You only did it with that view?"
- "No, before the end of the evening I was deeply interested in this man—my half brother. But I suppose that but for her influence it would not have occurred to me. That is as near as I can get. I can't answer questions in metaphysics."
- "We don't want metaphysics," the coroner answered severely. "We only want facts, but we must get at them in our own way. You say he fell helpless in your arms. Go on from that. What happened next?"
- "He was very heavy. I got him downstairs, and we leaned against the wall, while I called a cab. He was very heavy, and very cold. He spoke again then."

He looked at Beatrice, listening, bent forward in her seat. Her thoughts seemed more with the scene he described than with his present words, her eyes, fixed steadfastly on the coroner and her lover, changed with every question and answer.

The coroner was speaking.

- "And he was dead when you reached your rooms?"
- "I found then that he was dead."
- "You assume that he died in the cab?"
- "I don't know."
- "When do you think he died?"
- "If you ask me what I think-"

He stopped short. It was clear to everyone in the court that he was losing his self-control. He seemed scarcely able to command his voice or his memory. "If you ask me what I think——"

- "We wish to have your impression."
- "I don't know when he died."
- "Did you feel no change when you were supporting him in the cab?"
- "No change since he fell in my arms on the stairs. He turned very cold then, so did I. I turned cold at the touch of him."
 - "But you say he spoke again after he fell in your arms?"
 - "Yes, I said so."

His excitement, his nervousness, the hesitation with which he spoke, were all telling against him, and the antagonism of his

hearers took form in a general glance of sympathy towards Beatrice. He turned towards her to see if she understood it—if she knew that these people were all sorry for her because they believed her lover was a murderer. It seemed as if she did. It seemed as if in a moment it had all grown real to her, as if now she knew at last that this was no show, no pageant, but a real thing, as real as it was horrible, that her lover was in danger, might be lost to her, and he saw a moment's agonised outcry rise in her face. "I can't do without him." The words did not pass her lips, he did not hear them, but he knew of them as well as if they had been said loud for the whole world to hear. He began to feel very much more sorry for Beatrice than for himself. She had flung herself forward in her seat, listening with terrible intentness.

The coroner was speaking.

- "You have not told us what he said when he spoke again."
- "I would come back from death to serve her."

He looked at Beatrice as he spoke the words, half ashamed of troubling her with the repetition of them, they seemed such a mockery now. There was something cynically humorous in quoting such words from the dead man, who had felt and spoken such deep gratitude to her, and who, now lying still and white and silent behind that wall, had brought all this upon those who had befriended him. She had not moved. Still bending forward in her seat, still with the same curiously intent look on her face, she seemed repeating the words softly to herself. She scarcely noticed him. He felt as if he had lost her for a moment.

There were other witnesses. The doctor to tell how he was unable to account for the cause of death. It might be heart disease accelerated by hunger and exposure, or even hunger and exposure alone, but he could not be sure till after the inquest bost mortem. He seemed to think it absurd that the inquest should have been held at all till after the post mortem, and hinted that the police had acted very stupidly.

Then there was the inspector to tell how Sendal had denied all knowledge of his father's death, though he had been reminded that it had been in the papers. Of course a journalist might be expected to know everything that appeared in every paper, so much was clear to every thick-headed juror, who, had he been asked how many papers altogether there were in existence to read, would have been utterly unable to give an answer.

Then the cabman had to testify to his unprovoked anger and excited manner, and the coroner stretched forward, thrusting his hideous blue spectacles between him and Beatrice, questioning the man, encouraging him, seeming as if he thought it his special mission to fix guilt on her lover.

Did not Beatrice care? Had she forgotten him? Were all her thoughts behind that wall where, stretched out still and motionless, lay the man who had brought all this upon the two who had befriended him—the man who had said he would come back from the grave to serve her?

Gilbert, looking at her still intent face, felt as if he had lost her altogether. The business of the inquest went on. There were other witnesses to be examined. Everything seemed telling against him. He was suddenly startled to realise how little hope he had. Only he wished it was all over.

Well, it soon would be all over, and clearly it would end badly for him. The coroner was giving a few more little prefatory coughs; the police-inspector was scribbling some order on a torn leaf of a note book.

Suddenly Beatrice rose from her seat with a cry, and then stood silent, one hand outstretched towards the wall, every one waited amazed. What was she about to say?

She spoke quietly, steadily, but with long pauses between her words.

"He has risen. His eyes are open. He is speaking. Go to him."

Then she dropped back in her seat. Some of the officials, thinking her ill, hurried forward to help her from the place. Some, who were near the door, crept out from that room to the next, and rushed back exclaiming that it was true, the man was alive.

The doctor and the jury hurried into the next room. Gilbert and as many of the spectators as could push past the officials followed.

Wilfred Sendal had raised himself on one elbow, and brushing back the lank hair from his forehead, was staring puzzled round the room.

"What is all the fuss about?" he said.

The doctor came forward with a restorative; he pushed it away.

"What is the matter, what do you want to know?"

The doctor tried to stop the questioning coroner; the man protested.

"I'll not be moved, I'll not be moved or doctored. Let me speak. I shan't be here long, I must speak. You tell me," turning to Gilbert. "What does it all mean?"

He was not looking at him, his eyes were utterly vacant, the doctor, thinking it better to humour him, signed to Gilbert to come near and speak.

- "I am accused of murdering you, you were found dead in my rooms."
 - "Why should you murder me? I was dying as it was."
- "I am your younger brother, Gilbert Sendal, and I had much to gain by your death."
- "Yes, my brother, but you did not kill me. Cold and hunger killed me." His voice, clear but faint, gave signs of failing; he turned; still with the same vacant eyes to the crowd.
- "I love them, these two, as they love each other; no harm must come to them. I was dying of starvation when she found me. The food and drink I had in her house I saw her prepare, and she shared it. Nothing passed my lips after I left her door. Is everyone satisfied?"
- "You have freed your brother from suspicion," said the doctor, "now think of yourself, drink this."
 - "No, leave me alone, I have done my work."

His head dropped back on the cushion some one had brought, his vacant eyes still wandered round the room, Gilbert leaned forward to take his hand, he looked up.

"Tell her I did it," he murmured.

* * * * * * * *

Half-an-hour later, Sendal, free from all suspicion, was waiting with Beatrice at a side door, for the cab he had sent for to take her home. She had lost her courage now, and was clinging to him, crying a little.

"It is all over, dear," he said. "Be your brave self again. God knows how I wish the poor fellow had lived, we should have loved him."

"We can still."

"Yes. I am puzzled. It has all been very sad, and very strange. I never knew him, but I grudge to give him up to death. We owe him a great deal, Beatrice. I have learnt much from all this, and so have you I think."

"Yes," and her hold on him strengthened.

The doctor came down the passage. He came straight up to Sendal and spoke frankly.

"You are going? Wait one moment. This is a strange affair, Mr. Sendal. Do you make any complaint against me?"
"No."

"I suspected you, helped to point suspicion against you. Have you nothing to say against me for giving your living brother up for dead?"

"No." Sendal's voice was puzzled, and half afraid, as it had been when he answered the coroner.

"Mr. Sendal, if a young man, a novice—oh! I'll be frank, if anyone but myself had made such a blunder I should have thought and spoken very severely."

He hesitated; Sendal was looking at him curiously but not hostilely. He went on:

"But if his life had been the dearest on earth to me, I must have said the same, if my own life had depended on it, I must have said the same—the man was dead."

Sendal spoke with the air of a man who half fears the import of his own words, yet cannot withhold them.

"Was it a blunder? Did you notice: what he said? 'Cold and hunger killed me.' There is something very strange about it all."

He hesitated, looking at Beatrice, the doctor's eyes followed his. The dead man's strange impossible promise rose in the minds of each of the three, but none of them spoke it aloud.

The doctor looked at them, troubled and puzzled. "I am a scientific man," he said, "and my science told me he was dead. As you say, it is all very strange."

"Yes; can you explain it?"

"No. I can give you scientific names for the cause of his death, for his—revival—but I can't explain it, I can't explain it."



THE HAUNTED STATION.

Eclgravia Annual, 1892

BELGRAVIA ANNUAL.

CHRISTMAS, 1892.

The Baunted Station.

BY HUME NISBET,

Author of "Bail Up!" "The Savage Queen," "The Bushranger's Sweetheart," "The Jolly Roger," etc., etc.

IT looked as if a curse rested upon it, even under that glorious southern morn which transformed all that it touched into old oak and silver-bronze.

I use the term silver-bronze, because I can think of no other combination to express that peculiar bronzy tarnish, like silver that has lain covered for a time, which the moonlight in the tropics gives to the near objects upon which it falls—tarnished silver surfaces and deep sepia-tinted shadows.

I felt the weird influence of that curse even as I crawled into the gully that led to it; a shiver ran over me as one feels when they say some stranger is passing over your future grave; a chill gripped at my vitals as I glanced about me apprehensively, expectant of something ghoulish and unnatural to come upon me from the sepulchral gloom and mystery of the overhanging boulders under which I was dragging my wearied limbs. A deathly silence brooded within this rut-like and treeless gully that formed the only passage from the arid desert over which I had struggled, famishing and desperate; where it led to I neither knew nor cared, so that it did not end in a cul-de-sac.

At last I came to what I least expected to see in that part, a house of two storeys, with the double gables facing me, as it stood on a mound in front of a water-hole, the mellow full moon behind the shingly roof, and glittering whitely as it repeated itself in the still water against the inky blackness of the re-

flections cast by the denser masses of the house and vegetation about it.

It seemed to be a wooden erection, such as squatters first raise for their homesteads after they have decided to stay; the intermediate kind of station, which takes the place of the temporary shanty while the proprietor's bank account is rapidly swelling, and his children are being educated in the city boarding schools to know their own social importance. By and bye, when he is out of the mortgagee's hands, he may discard this comfortable house, as he has done his shanty, and go in for stateliness and stone-work, but to the tramp or the bushranger, the present house is the most welcome sight, for it promises to the one shelter, and to the other a prospect of loot.

There was a verandah round the basement that stood clear above the earth on piles, with a broad ladder stair leading down to the garden walk which terminated at the edge of the pool or water hole; under the iron roofing of the verandah I could make out the vague indications of French doors that led to the reception rooms, etc., while above them were bedroom windows, all dark with the exception of one of the upper windows, the second one from the end gable, through which a pale greenish light streamed faintly.

Behind the house, or rather from the centre of it, as I afterwards found out, projected a gigantic and lifeless gum tree, which spread its fantastic limbs and branches wildly over the roof, and behind that again a mass of chaotic and planted greenery, all softened and generalized in the thin silvery mist which emanated from the pool and hovered over the ground.

At the first glance it appeared the abode of a romantic owner, who had fixed upon a picturesque site, and afterwards devoted himself to making it comfortable as well as beautiful. He had planted creepers and trained them over the walls, passion-fruit and vines clung closely to the posts and trellis work and broke the square outlines of windows and angles, a wild tangle of shrubs and flowers covered the mound in front and trailed into the water without much order, so that it looked like the abode of an imaginative poet rather than the station of a practical money-grubbing squatter.

As I quitted the desolate and rock-bound gully and entered upon this romantic domain, I could not help admiring the artful

manner in which the owner had left Nature alone where he could do so; the gum trees which he had found there were still left as they must have been for ages, great trees shooting up hundreds of feet into the air, some of them gaunt and bald with time, others with their leafage still in a flourishing condition, while the more youthful trees were springing out of the fertile soil in all directions, giving the approach the appearance of an English park, particularly with the heavy night-dew that glistened over them.

But the chill was still upon me that had gripped me at the entrance of the gully, and the same lifeless silence brooded over the house, garden, pool and forest which had awed me amongst the boulders, so that as I paused at the edge of the water and regarded the house, I again shuddered as if spectres were round me, and murmured to myself, "Yes, it looks like a place upon which has fallen a curse."

* * * * * * *

Two years before this night, I had been tried and condemned to death for murder, the murder of the one I loved best on earth, but, through the energy of the press and the intercession of a number of influential friends, my sentence had been mercifully commuted to transportation for life in Western Australia.

The victim, whom I was proved by circumstantial evidence to have murdered, was my young wife, to whom I had been married only six months before; ours was a love match, and until I saw her lying stark before me, those six months had been an uninterrupted honeymoon, without a cloud to cross it, a brief term of heaven, which accentuated the after misery.

I was a medical practitioner in a small country village which I need not name, as my supposed crime rang through England. My practice was new but growing, so that, although not too well off, we were fairly comfortable as to position, and, as my wife was modest in her desires, we were more than contented with our lot.

I suppose the evidence was strong enough to place my guilt beyond a doubt to those who could not read my heart and the heart of the woman I loved more than life. She had not been very well of late, yet, as it was nothing serious, I attended her myself; then the end came with appalling suddenness, a postmortem examination proved that she had been poisoned, and that the drug had been taken from my surgery, by whom or for what reason is still a mystery to me, for I do not think I had an enemy in the world, nor do I think my poor darling had either.

At the time of my sentence, I had only one wish, and that was to join the victim of this mysterious crime, so that I saw the judge put on the fatal black cap with a feeling of pleasure, but when afterwards I heard it was to be transportation instead, then I flung myself down in my cell and hurled imprecations on those officious friends who had given me slavery and misery instead of release. Where was the mercy in letting me have life, since all had been taken from it which made it worth holding?—the woman who had lain in my arms while together we built up glowing pictures of an impossible future, my good name lost, my place amongst men destroyed; henceforward I would be only recognised by a number, my companions the vilest, my days dragged out in chains until the degradation of my lot encrusted over that previous memory of tenderness and fidelity, and I grew to be like the other numbered felons, a mindless and emotionless animal.

Fortunately, at this point of my sufferings, oblivion came in the form of delirium, so that the weeks passed in a dream, during which my lost wife lived once more with me as we had been in the past, and by the time the ship's doctor pronounced me recovered, we were within a few days of our dreary destination. Then my wife went from me to her own place, and I woke up to find that I had made some friends amongst my fellowconvicts, who had taken care of me during my insanity.

We landed at Fremantle, and began our life, road-making, that is; each morning we were driven out of the prison like cattle chained together in groups, and kept in the open until sundown, when we were once more driven back to sleep.

For fourteen months this dull monotony of eating, working and sleeping went on without variation, and then the chance came that I had been hungering for all along; not that liberty was likely to do me much good, only that the hope of accomplishing it kept me alive.

Three of us made a run for it one afternoon, just before the gun sounded for our recall, while the rest of the gang, being in our confidence, covered our escape until we had got beyond gunshot distance. We had managed to file through the chain which linked us together, and we ran towards the bush with the broken pieces in our hands as weapons of defence.

My two comrades were desperate criminals, who, like myself, had been sentenced for life, and, as they confessed themselves, were ready to commit any atrocity rather than be caught and taken back.

That night and the next day we walked in a straight line about forty miles through the bush, and then, being hungry and tired, and considering ourselves fairly safe, we lay down to sleep without any thought of keeping watch.

But we had reckoned too confidently upon our escape, for about daybreak the next morning we were roused up by the sound of galloping horses, and, springing to our feet and climbing a gum tree, we saw a dozen of mounted police, led by two black trackers, coming straight in our direction. Under the circumstances there were but two things left for us to do, either to wait until they came and caught us, or run for it until we were beaten or shot down.

One of my companions decided to wait and be taken back, in spite of his bravado the night before; an empty stomach demoralizes most men; the other one made up his mind, as I did, to run as long as we could. We started in different directions, leaving our mate sitting under the gum tree, he promising to keep them off our track as long as possible.

The fact of him being there when the police arrived gave us a good start. I put all my speed out, and dashed along until I had covered, I daresay, about a couple of miles, when all at once the scrub came to an end, and before me I saw an open space, with another stretch of bush about half a mile distant, and no shelter between me and it.

As I stood for a few minutes to recover my breath, I heard two or three shots fired to the right, the direction my companion had taken, and on looking that way I saw that he also had gained the open, and was followed by one of the trackers and a couple of the police. He was still running, but I could see that he was wounded from the way he went.

Another shot was sent after him, that went straight to its mark, for all at once he threw up his arms and fell prone upon his face, then, hearing the sounds of pursuit in my direction, I

waited no longer, but bounded full into the morning sunlight, hoping, as I ran, that I might be as lucky as he had been, and get a bullet between my shoulders and so end my troubles.

I knew that they had seen me, and were after me almost as soon as I had left the cover, for I could hear them shouting for me to stop, as well as the clatter of their horses' hoofs on the hard soil, but still I kept to my course, waiting upon the shots to sound which would terminate my wretched existence, my backnerves quivering in anticipation and my teeth meeting in my under-lip.

One!

Two!!

Two reports sounded in my ears; a second after the bullets had whistled past my head; and then, before the third and fourth reports came, something like hot iron touched me above my left elbow, while the other bullet whirred past me with a singing wail, cooling my cheek with the wind it raised, and then I saw it ricochet in front of me on the hill side, for I was going up a slight rise at the time.

I had no pain in my arm, although I knew that my humerus was splintered by that third last shot, but I put on a final spurt in order to tempt them to fire again.

What were they doing? I glanced over my shoulder as I rushed, and saw that they were spreading out, fan-like, and riding like fury, while they hurriedly reloaded. Once more they were taking aim at me, and then I looked again in front.

Before me yawned a gulf, the depth of which I could not estimate, yet in width it was over a hundred feet. My pursuers had seen this impediment also, for they were reining up their horses, while they shouted to me, more frantically than ever, to stop.

Why should I stop? flashed the thought across my mind as I neared the edge. Since their bullets had denied me the death I courted, why should I pause at the death spread out for me so opportunely?

As the question flashed through me, I answered it by making the leap, and as I went down I could hear the reports of the rifles above me.

Down into shadow from the sun-glare I dropped, the outer branches of a tree breaking with me as I fell through them.

Another obstacle caught me a little lower, and gave way under my weight, and then with an awful wrench, that nearly stunned me, I felt myself hanging by the remnant of the chain which was still rivetted to my waist-band, about ten feet from the surface, and with a hundred and fifty feet of a drop below me before I could reach the bottom. The chain had somehow got entangled in a fork of the last tree through which I had broken.

Although that sudden wrench was excruciating, the exigency of my position compelled me to collect my faculties without loss of time. Perhaps my months of serfdom and intercourse with felons had blunted my sensibility, and rendered me more callous to danger and bodily pain than I had been in my former and happier days, or the excitement of that terrible chase was still urging within me, for without more than a second's pause, and almost indifferent glance downwards to those distant boulders, I made a wild clutch with my unwounded arm at the branch which had caught me, and with an effort drew myself up to it, so that the next instant I was astride it, or rather crouching, where my loose chain had caught. Then, once more secure, I looked upwards to where I expected my hunters to appear.

When I think upon it now, it was a marvel how I ever got to be placed where I was, for I was under the shelving ledge from which I had leapt, that is, it spread over me like a roof, so that I must conclude that the first tier of branches must have bent inwards, and so landed me on to the second tree at a slant. At least, this is the only way in which I can account for my position.

The tree on which I sat grew from a crevice on the side of the precipice, and from the top could not be seen by those above, neither could I see them, although they looked down after me, but I could hear them plainly enough and what they said.

"That fellow has gone right enough, Jack, although I don't see his remains below; shall we try to get down and make sure?" I heard one say, while another replied:

"What's the good of wasting time; he's as dead as the other chap, after that drop, and they will both be picked clean enough, so let us get back to Fremantle with the living one, and report the other two as wiped out; we have a long enough journey, before us, sergeant."

"Yes, I suppose so," answered the sergeant. "Well, boys, we

may say that there are two promising bushrangers the less for this colony to support, so right about, home's the word."

I heard their horses wheel round and go off at a canter after this final speech, and then I was left alone on my airy perch, to plan out how best I was to get down with my broken arm, for it was impossible to get up, and also what I was likely to do with my liberty in that desolate region.

Desperate men are not very particular about the risks they run, and I ran not a few before I finally reached the bottom of that gulch, risky drops from one ledge to another, frantic clutchings at branches and tree roots; sufficient that I did reach the level ground at last more nearly dead than alive, so that I was fain to lie under the shadow of a boulder for hours without making an effort to rise and continue my journey.

Then, as night was approaching, I dragged myself along until I came to some water, where, after drinking and bracing up my broken arm with a few gum-trunk shards, and binding them round with some native grasses, while I made my supper of the young leaves of the eucalyptus bushes, I went on.

On, on, on for weeks, until I had lost all count of time, I wandered, carrying my broken fetters with me, and my broken arm gradually mending of its own accord. Sometimes I killed a snake or an iguana during the day with the branch I used for a stick, or a 'possum or wild cat at night, which I devoured raw. Often I existed for days on grass roots or the leaves of the gumtree, anything was good enough to fill up the gap.

My convict garb was in tatters and my feet bootless by this time, and my hair and beard hung over my shoulders and chest, while often I went for days in a semi-conscious state, for the fierce sun seemed to wither up my blood and set fire to my brain.

Where I was going I could not tell, and still, with all the privation and misery, the love of life was once again stronger in me than it had been since I had lost my place amongst civilized men, for I was at liberty and alone to indulge in fancy.

And yet it did not seem altogether fancy that my lost wife was with me on that journey. At first she came only when I lay down to sleep, but after a time she walked with me hand in hand during the day as well as in my dreams.

Dora was her name, and soon I forgot that she had been dead, for she was living and beautiful as ever as we went along

together, day after day, speaking to each other like lovers as we used to speak, and she did not seem to mind my ragged, degraded costume, or my dirty, tangled beard, but caressed me with the same tenderness as of yore.

Through the bush, down lonely gullies, over bitter deserts and salt marshes, we passed as happy and affectionate as fond lovers could be who are newly married, and whom the world cannot part, my broken chain rattling as I staggered onwards, while she smiled as if pleased with the music, because it was the chain which I was wearing for her dear sake.

Let me think for a moment—was she with me through that last desert before I came to that gloomy gully? I cannot be quite sure of that, but this I do know that she was not with me after the chill shadows of the boulders drew me into them, and I was quite alone when I stood by the water-hole looking upon that strange and silent house.

* * * * * * *

It was singular that the house should be here at all in this far-off and as yet unnamed portion of Western Australia, for I naturally supposed that I had walked hundreds of miles since leaving the convict settlement, and as I had encountered no one, not even a single tribe of wandering blacks, it seemed impossible to believe that I was not the first white man who had penetrated so far, and yet there it loomed before me, substantial-looking in its masses, with painted weatherboards, shingles, iron-sheeting, carved posts and trellis-work, French windows, and the signs of cultivation about it, although bearing the traces of late neglect.

Was it inhabited? I next asked myself as I looked steadily at that dimly-illumined window; seemingly it was, for as I mentally asked the question, a darkness blotted out the light for a few moments and then moved slowly aside, while the faint pallor once more shone out; it appeared to be from the distance a window with a pale green blind drawn down, behind which a lamp turned low was burning, possibly some invalid who was restlessly walking about, while the rest of the household slept.

Would it be well to rouse them up at this hour of the night? I next queried as I paused, watching the chimney tops from which no wreath of smoke came, for although it did not seem late, judging from the height of the moon, yet it was only natural to suppose that in this isolated place the people would retire

early. Perhaps it would be better to wait where I was till morning and see what they were like before I ventured to ask hospitality from them, in my ragged yet unmistakably convict dress. I would rather go on as I was than run the risk of being dragged back to prison.

How chilly the night vapours were which rose from this large pool, for it was more like the moat round some ancient ruin than an ordinary Australian water-hole. How ominous the shadows that gathered over this dwelling, and which even the great and lustrous moon, now clear of the gable end, seemed unable to dissipate, and what a dismal effect that dimly-burning lamp behind the pale green blind gave to it.

I turned my eyes from the window to the pond from which the ghostly vapours were steaming upwards in such strange shapes; they crossed the reflections like grey shadows and floated over the white glitter which the moon cast down, like spectres following each other in a stately procession, curling upwards interlaced, while the gaunt trees behind them altered their shapes and looked demoniac in their fantastic outlines, shadows passing along and sending back doleful sighs, which I tried all my might to think was the night breeze but without succeeding.

Hush! was that a laugh which wafted from the house, a low, but blood-curdling cachinnation such as an exultant devil might utter who had witnessed his fell mischief accomplished, followed by the wail of a woman, intermixed with the cry of a child!

Ah! what a fool I was to forget the cry of the Australian king-fisher; of course that was it, of course, of course, but——

The shapes are thickening over that mirror-like pool, and as I look I see a woman with a chalk-white face and eyes distended in horror, with a child in her hands—a little girl—and beside them the form of a man whose face changes into two different men, one the face of death, and the other like that of a demon with glaring eyeballs, while he points from the woman and child to the sleeping pool.

What is the devil-spectre pointing at, as he laughs once more, while the woman and child shrink with affright?

The face that he wore a moment ago, the face of the dead man whom I can see floating amongst that silver lustre.

* * * * * *

I must have fainted at the weird visions of the night before,

or else I may have fallen asleep and dreamt them, for when I opened my eyes again the morning sun was pouring over the landscape and all appeared changed.

The pool was still there, but it looked like a natural Australian water-hole which had been deepened and lengthened, and artificially arranged by a tasteful proprietor to beautify his estate; water-lilies grew round the edges and spread themselves in graceful patches about; it was only in the centre portion, where the moonlight had glinted and the other reflections cast themselves, that the water was clear of weeds, and there it still lay inky and dangerous-like in its depth.

Over the building itself clustered a perfect tangle of vegetable parasites, Star-of-Bethlehem, Maiden-blush roses, and Gloire-de-Dijon, passion-flowers and convolvulus, intermingling with a large grape-laden vine going to waste, and hanging about in half-wild, neglected festoons; a woman's hand had planted these tendrils, as well as the garden in front, for I could see that flowers predominated.

As for the house itself, it still stood silent and deserted-looking, the weatherboards had shrunk a good deal with the heat of many suns beating upon them, while the paint, once tasteful in its varied tints, was bleached into dry powder; the trellis-work also on the verandah had in many places been torn away by the weight of the clinging vines, and between the window-frames and the windows yawned wide fissures where they had shrunk from each other.

I looked round at the landscape, but could see no trace of sheep or cattle, or humanity; it spread out a sun-lit solitude where Nature, for a little while trained to order, had once more asserted her independent lavishness.

A little of my former awe came upon me as I stood for a few moments hesitating to advance, but at the sight of those luscious-looking bunches of grapes, which seemed to promise some fare more substantial inside, the dormant cravings for food which I had so long subdued came upon me with tenfold force, and, without more than a slight tremor of superstitious dread, I hurriedly crushed my way through the tangle of vegetation, and made for the verandah and open door of the hall.

Delicious grapes they were, as I found when, after tearing off

a huge bunch, and eating them greedily, I entered the silent hall and began my exploration.

The dust and fine sand of many "brick-fielders," i.e., sand-storms, lay thickly on every object inside, so that as I walked I left my footprints behind me as plainly as if I had been walking over snow. In the hall I found a handsome stand and carved table with chairs, a hat and riding-whip lay on the table, while on the rack I saw two or three coats and hats hanging, with sticks and umbrellas beneath, all white with dust.

The dining-room door stood ajar, and as I entered I could see that it also had been undisturbed for months, if not for years. It had been handsomely furnished, with artistic hangings and stuffed leather chairs and couches, while on the elaborately carved cheffonier was a plentiful supply of spirit and wine decanters, with cut glasses standing ready for use. On the table stood a bottle of Three-star brandy, half-emptied, and by its side a water-filter and glass as they had been left by the last user.

I smelt the bottle, and found that the contents were mellow and good, and when, after dusting the top, I put it to my mouth, I discovered that the bouquet was delicious; then, invigorated by that sip, I continued my voyage of discovery.

The cheffonier was not locked, and inside I discovered rows of sealed bottles, which satisfied me that I was not likely to run short of refreshments in the liquid form at any rate, so, content with this pleasant prospect, I ventured into the other apartments.

The drawing-room was like the room I had left, a picture of comfort and elegance, when once the accumulation of dust and sand had been removed.

The library or study came next, which I found in perfect order, although I left the details for a more leisurely examination.

I next penetrated the kitchen, which I saw was comfortable, roomy and well-provided, although in more disorder than the other rooms; pans stood rusting in the fire-place, dishes lay dirty and in an accumulated pile on the table, as if the servants had left in a hurry and the owners had been forced to make what shifts they could during their absence.

Yet there was no lack of such provisions as an up-country station would be sure to lay in; the pantry I found stored like

a provision shop, with flitches of bacon, hams sewn in canvas, tinned meat and soups of all kinds, with barrels and bags and boxes of flour, sugar, tea and other sundries, enough to keep me going for years if I was lucky enough to be in possession.

I next went upstairs to the bedrooms, up a thickly-carpeted staircase, with the white linen overcloth still upon it. In the first room I found the bed with the bed-clothes tumbled about as if the sleeper had lately left it; the master of the house I supposed, as I examined the wardrobe and found it well stocked with male apparel. At last I could cast aside my degrading rags, and fit myself out like a free man, after I had visited the workshop and filed my fetters from me.

Another door attracted me on the opposite side of the lobby, and this I opened with some considerable trepidation because it led into the room which I had seen lighted up the night before.

It seemed untenanted, as I looked in cautiously, and like the other bed-room was in a tumble of confusion, a woman's room, for the dresses and underclothing were lying about, a bed-room which had been occupied by a woman and a child, for a crib stood in one corner, and on a chair lay the frock and other articles belonging to a little girl of about five or six years of age.

I looked at the window, it had venetian blinds upon it, and they were drawn up, so that my surmise had been wrong about the pale green blind, but on the end side of the room was another window with the blinds also drawn up, and thus satisfied I walked in boldly; what I had thought to be a light, had only been the moonlight streaming from the one window to the other, while the momentary blackening of the light had been caused, doubtless, by the branches of the trees outside, moved forward by the night breeze. Yes, that must have been the cause, so that I had nothing to fear, the house was deserted, and my own property, for the time at least. There was a strange and musty odour in this bed-room, which blended with the perfume which the owner had used, and made me for a moment almost giddy, so the first thing I did was to open both windows and let in the morning air, after which I looked over to the unmade bed, and then I staggered back with a cry of horror.

There amongst the tumble of bed-clothes lay the skeletons of what had been two human beings, clad in embroidered nightdresses. One glance was enough to convince me, with my medical knowledge, that the gleaming bones were those of a woman and a child, the original wearers of those dresses which lay scattered about.

What awful tragedy had taken place in this richly furnished but accursed house? Recovering myself, I examined the remains more particularly, but could find no clue, they were lying reposefully enough, with arms interlacing as if they had died or been done to death in their sleep, while those tiny anatomists, the ants, had found their way in, and cleaned the bones completely, as they very soon do in this country.

With a sick sensation at my heart, I continued my investigations throughout the other portions of the station. In the servants' quarters I learnt the cause of the unwashed dishes; three skeletons lay on the floor in different positions as they had fallen, while their shattered skulls proved the cause of their end, even if the empty revolver that I picked up from the floor had not been evidence enough. Some one must have entered their rooms and woke them rudely from their sleep in the night time for they lay also in their blood-stained night-dresses, and beside them, on the boards, were dried-up markings which were unmistakable.

The rest of the house was as it had been left by the murderer or murderers. Three domestics, with their mistress and child, had been slaughtered, and then the guilty wretches had fled without disturbing anything else.

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It was once again night, and I was still in the house which my first impulse had been to leave with all haste after the gruesome discoveries that I had made.

But several potent reasons restrained me from yielding to that impulse. I had been wandering for months, and living like a wild beast, while here I had everything to my hand which I needed to recruit my exhausted system. My curiosity was roused, so that I wanted to penetrate the strange mystery if I could, by hunting after and reading all the letters and papers that I might be able to find, and to do this required leisure; thirdly, as a medical practitioner who had passed through the anatomical schools, the presence of five skeletons did not have much effect upon me, and lastly, before sun-down the weather had broken, and one of those fierce storms of rain, wind, thunder

and lightning had come on, which utterly prevented any one who had the chance of a roof to shelter him from turning out to the dangers of the night.

These were some of my reasons for staying where I was, at least the reasons that I explained to myself, but there was another and a more subtle motive which I could not logically explain, and which yet influenced me more than any of the others. I could not leave the house, now that I had taken possession of it, or rather, if I may say it, now that the house had taken possession of me.

I had lifted the bucket from the kitchen, and found my way to the draw-well in the back-garden, with the uncomfortable feeling that some unseen force was compelling me to stay here. I discovered a large file and freed myself from my fetters, and then, throwing my rags from me with disgust, I clad myself in one of the suits that I found in the wardrobe upstairs, then I set to work dusting and sweeping out the dining-room, after which I lit a fire, retrimmed the lamps, and cooked a substantial meal for myself, then the storm coming on decided me, so that spent the remainder of the afternoon making the place comfortable, and when darkness did come, I had drawn the blinds down and secured the shutters, and with a lighted lamp, a bottle of good wine, and a box of first-class cigars which I also found in the cheffonier, with a few volumes that I had taken from the book shelves at random, and an album of photographs that I picked up from the drawing-room table, I felt a different man from what I had been the night previous, particularly with that glowing log fire in the grate.

I left the half-emptied bottle of brandy where I had found it, on the table, with the used glass and the water filter untouched, as I did also the chair that had been beside them. I had a repugnance to those articles which I could not overcome; the murderer had used them last, possibly as a reviver after his crimes, for I had reasoned out that one hand only had been at the work, and that man's the owner of the suit which I was then wearing and which fitted me so exactly, otherwise why should the house have been left in the condition that it was?

As I sat at the end of the table and smoked the cigar, I rebuilt the whole tragedy, although as yet the motive was not

so clear, and as I thought the matter out, I turned over the leaves of the album and looked at the photographs?

Before me, on the walls, hung three oil portraits, enlargements they were, and as works of art vile things, yet doubtless they were faithful enough likenesses. In the album, I found three cabinet portraits from which the paintings had been enlarged.

They were the portraits of a woman of about twenty-six, a girl of five years, and a man of about thirty-two.

The woman was good-looking, with fresh colour, blue eyes and golden-brown hair. The girl—evidently her daughter—for the likeness was marked between the two, had one of those seraphic expressions which some delicate children have who are marked out for early death, that places them above the plane of grosser humanity. She looked, as she hung between the two portraits, with her glory of golden hair, like the guardian angel of the woman who was smiling so contentedly and unconsciously from her gilded frame.

The man was pallid-faced and dark, clean-shaven, all except the small black moustache, with lips which, except the artist had grossly exaggerated the colour, were excessively and disagreeably vivid. His eyes were deep set, and glowing as if with the glitter of a fever.

"These would be the likenesses of the woman and child whose skeletons lay unburied upstairs, and that pallid-faced, feverisheyed ghoul, the fiend who had murdered them, his wife and child," I murmured to myself as I watched the last portrait with morbid interest

"Right and wrong, Doctor, as you medical men mostly are," answered a deep voice from the other end of the table.

I started with amazement, and looked from the painting to the vacant chair beside the brandy bottle, which was now occupied by what appeared to be the original of the picture I had been looking at, face, hair, vivid scarlet lips and deep-set fiery eyes, which were fixed upon me intently and mockingly

How had he entered without my observing him? By the window? No, for that I had firmly closed and secured myself, and as I glanced at it I saw that it still remained the same. By the door? Perhaps so, although he must have closed it again after he had entered without my hearing him, as he might easily have done during one of the claps of thunder, which were now

almost incessant, as were the vivid flashes of wild fire or lightning that darted about, while the rain lashed against the shutters outside.

He was dripping wet, as I could see, so that he must have come from that deluge, bareheaded and dripping, with his hair and moustache draggling over his glistening, ashy cheeks and bluish chin, as if he had been submerged in water, while weeds and slime hung about his saturated garments; a gruesome sight for a man who fancied himself alone to see start up all of a sudden, and no wonder that it paralyzed me and prevented me from finding the words I wanted at the moment. Had he lain hidden somewhere watching me take possession of his premises, and being, as solitary men sometimes are, fond of dramatic effect, slipped in while my back was turned from the door to give me a surprise? If so, he had succeeded, for I never before felt so craven-spirited or horror-stricken, my flesh was creeping and my hair bristling, while my blood grew to ice within me. The very lamp seemed to turn dim, and the fire smouldered down on the hearth, while the air was chill as a charnel vault, as I sat with shivering limbs and chattering teeth before this evil visitor.

Outside, the warring elements raged and fought, shaking the wooden walls, while the forked flames darted between us, lighting up his face with a ghastly effect. He must have seen my horror, for he once more laughed that low, malicious chuckle that I had heard the night before, as he again spoke.

"Make yourself at home, Doctor, and try some of this cognac instead of that washy stuff you are drinking. I am only sorry that I cannot join you in it, but I cannot just yet."

I found words at last and asked him questions, which seemed impertinent in the extreme, considering where I was.

"Who are you? Where do you come from? What do you want?"

Again that hateful chuckle, as he fixed his burning eyes upon me with a regard which fascinated me in spite of myself.

"Who am I, do you ask? Well, before you took possession of this place I was its owner. Where do I come from? From out of there last."

He pointed backwards towards the window, which burst open as he uttered the words, while through the driving rain a flash of lightning seemed to dart from his outstretched finger and disappear into the centre of the lake, then after that hurried glimpse, the shutters clashed together again and we were as before.

- "What do I want? You, for lack of a better."
- "What do you want with me?" I gasped.
- "To make you myself."
- "I do not understand you, what are you?"
- "At present nothing, yet with your help, I shall be a man once more, while you shall be free and rich, for you shall have more gold than you ever could dream of."
 - "What can I do for you?"
- "Listen to my story and you will see. Ten years ago I was a successful gold finder, the trusting husband of that woman, and the fond father of that girl. I had likewise a friend whom I trusted, and took to live with me as a partner. We lived here together, my friend, myself, my wife and my daughter, for I was romantic and had raised this house to be close to the mine which I had discovered, and which I will show you if you consent to my terms.
- "One night my friend murdered me and pitched my body into that water-hole where the bones still lie. He did this because he coveted my wife and my share of the money."

I was calm now, but watchful, for it appeared that I had to deal with a madman.

- "In my life-time I had been a trusting and guileless simpleton, but no sooner was my spirit set free than vengeance transformed its nature. I hovered about the place where all my affections had been centred, watching him beguile the woman who had been mine until he won her. She waited three years for me to return, and then she believed his story that I had been killed by the natives, and married him. They travelled to where you came from, to be married, and I followed them closely, for that was the chance I waited upon. The union of those two once accomplished he was in my power for ever, for this had established the link that was needed for me to take forcible possession of him."
- "And where was his spirit meantime?" I asked, to humour the maniac.
 - "In my grasp also, a spirit rendered impotent by murder and

ingratitude; a spirit which I could do with as I pleased, so long as the wish I had was evil. I took possession of his body, the mirage of which you see now, and from that moment until the hour that our daughter rescued her from his clutches, he made the life of my former wife a hell on earth. I prompted his murder-embrued spirit to madness, leaving him only long enough to himself after I had braced him up to do the deed of vengeance."

"How did the daughter save the mother?"

"By dying with her, and by her own purity tearing the freed spirit from my clutches. I did not intend the animal to do all that he did, for I wanted the mother only, but once the murder lust was on him, I found that he was beyond my influence. He slew the two by poison, as he had done me, then, frenzied, he murdered the servants, and finally exterminated himself by flinging himself into the pool. That was why I said that I came last from out of there, where both my own remains and his lie together."

"Yes, and what is my share of the business?"

"To look on me passively for a few moments, as you are at present doing, that is all I require."

I did not believe his story about his being only a mirage or spectre, for he looked at the moment corporal enough to do me a considerable amount of bodily harm, and therefore to humour him, until I could plan out a way to overpower him, I fixed my eyes upon his steadfastly, as he desired.

Was I falling asleep, or being mesmerized by this homicidal lunatic? As he glared at me with those fiery orbs and an evil contortion curling the blood-red lips, while the forked lightning played around him, I became helpless. He was creeping slowly towards me as a cat might steal upon a mouse, and I was unable to move, or take my eyes from his eyes which seemed to be charming my life-blood from me, when suddenly I heard the distant sound of music, through a lull of the tempest, the rippling of a piano from the drawing-room with the mingling of a child's silvery voice as it sang its evening hymn, and at the sound his eyes shifted while he fell back a step or two with an agonized spasm crossing his ghastly and dripping wet face.

Then the hurricane broke loose once more, with a resistless fury, while the door and window burst open, and the shutters were dashed into the room.

I leapt to my feet in a paroxysm of horror, and sprang towards the open door with that demon, or maniac, behind me.

Merciful heavens! the drawing-room was brilliantly lighted up, and there, seated at the open piano, was the woman whose bones I had seen bleaching upstairs, with the seraphic-faced child singing her hymn.

Out to the tempest I rushed madly, and heedless of where I went, so that I escaped from that accursed and haunted house, on, past the water-hole and into the glade, where I turned my head back instinctively, as I heard a wilder roar of thunder and the crash as if a tree had been struck.

What a flash that was which lighted up the scene and showed me the house collapsing as an erection of cards. It went down like an avalanche before that zig-zag flame, which seemed to lick round it for a moment, and then disappear into the earth.

Next instant I was thrown off my feet by the earthquake which shook the ground under me, while, as I still looked on where the house had been, I saw that the ruin had caught fire, and was blazing up in spite of the torrents that still poured down, and as it burned, I saw the mound sink slowly out of sight, while the reddened smoke eddied about in the same strange shapes which the vapours had assumed the night before, scarlet ghosts of the demon and his victims.

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Two months after this, I woke up to find myself in a Queens-land back-country station. They had found me wandering in a delirious condition over one of their distant runs six weeks before my return to consciousness, and as they could not believe that a pedestrian, without provisions, could get over that unknown stretch of country from Fremantle, they paid no attention to my ravings about being an escaped convict, particularly as the rags I had on could never have been prison made. Learning, however, that I had medical knowledge, by the simple method of putting it to the test, my good rescuers set me up in my old profession, where I still remain—a Queensland back-country doctor.

The Black Pointer.

BY EDITH STEWART DREWRY.

Author of "Only an Actress," "On Dangerous Ground," "Seen in a Mirror," Etc.

CHAPTER I.

MY UNWELCOME VISITOR.

"A GENTLEMAN wishes to see you, Sir."

I looked up with an impatient frown, pen in hand, from the heap of letters, proofs, and manuscript which were strewed over my large office secretaire. I was the editor of a not inconsiderable weekly paper called *The Conservative*.

"Who is he, Harris?" I said, "I'm busy getting up copy, can't see anyone for quite half-an-hour. What's his name?"

"Fitzroy, Sir," answered the clerk.

"Don't know it at all; he can call again, or wait out in the office. Just whistle up to the composing-room, please, to send down Spider."

Harris did so, and went out almost as the lad summoned appeared, a smart, quick-witted boy of fourteen, nick-named Spider, from his quickness of movement—and tongue.

"Copy ready, Sir?" said Spider alertly.

"This lot, yes." I tossed over a roll of copy, which Spider deftly caught. "Tell Mr. Ringar (the printing overseer) to send you down in half-an-hour for the rest."

Spider, with a hasty, longing look at something in an immense oak chair in a shadowy corner opposite, vanished, but a moment after I heard him say to another boy who he encountered outside:

"Snowball, the gov'ner's got 'The Devil' in his office again! Blowed if I don't ask him to let's have him for a game in the dinner-time."

"You'd better," apostrophised I, looking lovingly across at my favourite. "Cheeky young imp!"

This last applied to Spider, of course, not the noble creature alluded to by so polite (!) a sobriquet, and which as a treat to

him I sometimes brought with me to the office, if perhaps my young wife were going to be absent from home the whole day.

This favourite was canine as may be guessed—an unusually large and magnificent young pointer dog—not the common liver-brown, but a rich, glossy black all over—a great rarity in the breed; he had not one white spot on him anywhere, and hence his name 'Don Diavolos,' which the young imps up in the composing-room had, on finding out the literal meaning of the name, rendered into the rough vernacular by which His Satanic Majesty is usually designated—the Devil!

Beyond his handsome sable coat and his pluck, my companion's diabolic name had no raison d'être at all, for a gentler, finer-tempered dog I defy anybody to show, indeed, he was almost too ready to make friends with everybody, unless positively active signs of hostility had been shown to himself or For our Don to show dislike or offer even to fly at anyone without direct command or decided provocation would indeed have been quite the eighth wonder of the world. The Don was as intelligent as he was affectionate, and knew quite well that when I was busy at my table he must be secondary, and so was wont to retreat to his pet corner, curl himself up on his huge oak chair, and go to sleep, only occasionally coming round to me for a caress and a stretch, then again stowing himself away in the dark corner where no one who came in escaped the keen notice of his bright dark eyes, though unless bidden he never came forward to wag his 'How d'ye do?' I very easily taught this discretion to my canine friend. Don's pedigree was unexceptionable on both sides; he had been given me at a month old by a sporting farmer who bred dogs, and whose son I had got on to the staff of a leading sporting paper. Don's own parents were brown, but the old farmer had told me-when, now, five years ago, he had put the pretty little black ball into my arms—"his paternal grandsire, Mr. Albemarle, was like this chap, as black as the ace of spades. I sold him six years back to an heiress from the north—a Miss Clifford."

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Well, in half an hour down came Spider, and bore off a big supply of that dearest food to the compositor's soul—copy, but the young monkey did not dare to ask for "The Devil!" I sounded the table gong beside me, and Harris appeared.

- "Is Mr. Fitzroy here?"
- "Yes, Sir, just come back."
- "Show him up then, Harris," said I, putting down my pen and leaning back. "No, Don, be still please."

Down on his paws went the noble black head again, with a deep-drawn sigh, but, as the door closed behind my visitor, I fancied—to my utter surprise—that my ear caught the deep mutter of a low menacing growl from the corner. Don growl! what could it mean?

It must have been fancy—a sound from outside, and the stranger evidently did not hear it or see the dog; my fancy, certainly.

"I presume you are Mr. Wilford Albemarle," said my visitor, taking the chair I indicated.

"That is my name," said I, keenly scanning the stranger, but covertly, under cover of the very long thick lashes which nature had kindly bestowed on me. The result of my scrutiny did not please me. The man was about forty—some eight years my senior—a tall, finely-built man, with straight features; good-looking certainly, but such a down-looking, haggard face, one I was certain a woman would distrust. I did at once; more, I was instantly conscious of a feeling of repellence and antagonism; there was an odd look too in his eyes—skulking, shall I call it?—that might at any moment become one of fear, and he had a queer restless, even nervous, movement of the right hand as if it were ready to be uplifted to ward off a blow.

Perhaps, being a writer, my dramatic imagination was too rampant, for I immediately began weaving a story about him—not a very complimentary one though. His errand was as prosaic and undramatic, however, as his face was the reverse of both.

He answered me.

"Mine is Fitzroy, and I called to see you about a house which you advertised to be let."

"Oh," said I, "but that is in my agent's hands, Mr. Fitzroy, so that I cannot treat behind his back."

"Of course not," said he with a half sneer, "but the matter stands thus: we could not agree about terms, and he said it was useless for him to ask you to alter your instructions. I could try myself if I liked—so here I am."

"The terms are very usual ones," said I, "for a house of that value, just entirely refitted too. £200 a year is a most moderate——"

"It is not the rent, Mr. Albemarle, but I don't wish to take a house for more than three years, though I would pay you £20 a year more for that."

Now we masculine creatures are very fond of hugging the belief that all the logic and calm reason, etc. is on our side, and all the impulsiveness on the side of the fair sex, a self-flattering chimera, which, personally, I gave up very early in my life's experience, as I found that men, nearly if not quite as often, thought and acted on impulse, as well as babbled secrets and gossiped, as women. I have mentioned the repellent feeling with which this man had instantly inspired me, and from the moment he unfolded his errand, I impulsively made up my mind that he should never cross threshold of mine as tenant or guest; he should not have the house if he would pay a thousand a year for it on a lease of seven instead of fourteen years. I grew quite cheerful over the easy door he had opened for me to get rid of his offer.

"My dear Sir," I replied, playing with my moustache, "I would not let the house for less than seven years' lease at any rent."

"Not if I offer you a hundred pounds down in hard cash for the accommodation?" said he, leaning forward.

" No."

"May I ask why not?"

What an ugly look flashed over his swarthy face!

"Certainly," said I, with provoking coolness. "I am not hard up for a hundred pounds, and I do not mean to let that house for so short a tenancy for any consideration" ("or" I mentally added, "to you, my friend, upon any terms)."

With a courteous but haughty inclination, I stood up to intimate that the interview was at an end. Fitzroy rose too, pushing back his chair; but as he did so, I saw him suddenly stand still as if petrified, his staring eyes fixed on the opposite corner with such an awful look of fear in them, such a deadly terror in his whole face, that my very blood seemed to curdle at the sight. My eyes instantly, instinctively, followed the direction of his, and beheld the black pointer not lying down,

not even sitting, but standing on the chair, his tail straight out, his head and muzzle stretched forwards with lips drawn back from the teeth, his forepaw uplifted, his eyes gleaming like fire in the gloom, fixed with a savage hate on Fitzroy; the dog was pointing as I knew pointers always do before flying at a foe. Utterly startled at the sight, I still saw the danger, and in the second the dog leaped, I vaulted like a gymnast right over my table and seized his collar, dragging him backwards by main force, just as the sharp grim teeth touched the man's dress.

"For Heaven's sake get out of the room!" said I, for the dog was so powerful, and struggled so fiercely to get loose, that I almost feared his collar might give way. "Down, Don, lie down, Sir!"

Fitzroy, instead of obeying me, had staggered back into his seat, still with that awful look of horror on his face, shaking from head to foot like one paralysed, and I heard a low mutter, hoarse with strange terror:

"It cannot be—the—same."

I dragged rather than led the pointer to the corner behind my chair, where, fastened to a strong ring in the wall, hung the chain in which I brought him through Fleet Street. To this I now secured him, and bidding him sternly "Lie down," turned to Mr. Fitzroy with feelings of scorn, as well as wonderment at the unmanly and singular fear he had betrayed; he had risen again and moved to the door, still quivering and livid.

"Why the devil didn't you tell me you had a fierce black pointer in the corner?" he demanded, "and I would never have come inside—never!"

"Really Mr. Fitzroy, I am vexed beyond measure at this occurrence, but how could I possibly guess that you had—well, such an extraordinary fear of dogs. As to my dog, I have never in my life been so utterly astounded. I never knew him shew the least animosity to anyone, much less fly, and I can't make it out at all."

"You've been quite mistaken in the cursed brute's temper," said he viciously, "that's all. Good morning."

And he went out quickly, without the least attempt to explain his conduct.

"Don, my dear boy," said I, unchaining my friend and caressing him, "you are a good dog, and know an evil man

when you see him. But there is something very odd in all this, my Don; he chose an odd expression too, and I'll try and learn who he is—if I can—at luncheon time. Lie down by me, my 'black pointer,' as he designated you, Don."

The Don obeyed, and I tried to work, but my mind was excited, full of that man's awful look. I could not concentrate my attention, and hailed the stroke of one.

Then I locked Don in the room, and went out to lunch.

CHAPTER II.

MY AGENT'S INFORMATION.

As luck would have it, the moment I entered the luncheon-room at the restaurant, I caught sight of my house-agent himself seated at a table apart. I gave my order and crossed to him at once.

- "How do, Gibson; you're the very man I wanted."
- "That's lucky, Sir, then," replied Mr. Gibson. "Have you seen Mr. Fitzroy?"
- "Yes, and it's about him I wanted to speak to you," said I. "What references did he give—do you know anything about him?"
- "Well, Sir, he referred me to his bankers, Messrs. Rayner & Co. and a Major Armstrong. Mr. Rayner said Mr. Fitzroy had banked with them for eight years, and was very well off—a most safe tenant! he had lived abroad principally for the last ten years, they believed, but was now about to marry an American heiress. The Major also spoke highly of him and said, laughing, he thought the lady was lucky. 'I don't know, Sir,' said I, 'I think I shouldn't fall in love with him if I was a lady.'"
- "Oho! then Gibson!" I said quickly, "he strikes you, too, as queer-looking! What did the Major say to that?"
- "'O!' said he, 'he's certainly not very cheerful-looking, but then he's had such troubles, years back—told me so himself, his wife ran away with a lover; poor Fitzroy tried every means possible to trace her, dead or alive, for two years, advertised, set detectives—everything; and then had to apply to the law, have her declared dead, and her fortune handed to him as under her will There being no child, this was done,' the Major said. It's very odd, Sir, though," added the agent, "that Mr. Fitzroy

is so obstinate against the seven years' lease, when he is so especially taken with the house and anxious to get it."

"Ah! then he said he liked it so much?" asked I quickly.

"No mistake, Mr. Albemarle," was the reply. "I took him over it myself, you see, and at first he rather pooh-poohed it, 'wasn't quite what he wanted, rooms so large, wasn't that part of Kensington damp?' etc. till we went downstairs, and I showed him that queer little room behind the panel, which no one would dream of being there—'the dear, little, mysterious, secret room,' Sir, Mrs. Albemarle called it, you know. Well, Mr. F. seemed quite amused at it—said it was a 'capital idea for a smoking-room—what queer nooks and hiding corners our fathers did build in these old houses, but really,' says he, 'I shall not tell my future bride of it, for she is such a timid, nervous creature, she'll fancy there is a ghost there!' When we came up again he said—well, after all, the house would suit him nicely, and he would take it at once, and gave me the reference, and as he was anxious to close the bargain I went on at once."

"But, Gibson, didn't he object then to the terms?"

"Not strongly, sir, that was his cunning—it wasn't till he called yesterday to clench it that the hitch arose in earnest. He would pay more rent or a premium, but he could not bind himself for so long; he was sure you would hear reason. 'Well, Sir,' says I at last, 'go to Mr. Albemarle and if you can change him you'll be cleverer than I am.' So he came."

"Yes," I spoke coolly, but my blood was throbbing excitedly in my veins, "he did, and was most eager to have the house, made all sorts of offers for three years—not seven, which I of course refused to even entertain. Now, look here, Gibson, I don't like that man or anything about him, and I've good reason to think that he will not trouble us again about my house, 'queer little room,' and all, but mind, if he does, you can tell him outright that I don't mean to let Garden Grove to him at any price."

"But, Sir, suppose he accedes to the seven years, and offers—"

"I don't care if he offer a twenty-one years' lease, and a fortune for rent," said I with an emphatic energy that made Gibson look at me. "He shall never be a tenant of mine."

"Very well, Sir."

I went back to the office and my work, but I could not get

that man's face, or all I had heard about him, out of my head, and the dog too deepened my intense excitement, for he was as strangely perturbed as I was, and lay, as dogs do when unhappy, all along, his tail straight, his head laid between his extended forepaws, uttering at intervals a little piteous, uneasy whine, and keeping his eyes fixed on my face with such a wistful, strangely human—no! unhuman—look, that my flesh began to creep, and I could almost have shrunk from my own pet dog as if some eerie "gytrash" of north-country legend were taking his form.

"Don't keep looking in that horrible uncanny way, Don," I exclaimed, "you look as if you knew all about it—if you could only speak! but we'll say nothing of this at home, Don, and we must forget it to-morrow."

Easier said than done; there are some things which take such fast and painful hold of the imagination that no efforts of reason or will can dislodge them entirely.

The next morning I told my wife not to sit up for me, as I could not be home till very late, or perhaps even next morning, as I had that evening to go down to Bellfield to attend and report a large Conservative meeting to be held there.

"But why must you go, dear?" asked Anna, "you have reporters."

"Yes, but the only one on our staff to whom I could trust this is ill, so I'll have to take it myself, and make sure it's all right. So good-bye till you see me, darling, take care of yourself and Don."

For you may be sure I did not take the pointer to-day. I caressed him, kissed the dear wife, and went off to Fleet Street, my mind still haunted by the event of yesterday, and even when I was busiest I was conscious that it lay at the back of my thoughts, and when I was in the train in the evening, en route for Bellfield, I gave them full rein. I puzzled and conjectured, and filled in all the gaps by weaving in a dark romance of mystery. I was recalled to the matter-of-fact common-place by the stopping of the train at my destination.

Bellfield was a small bye-station, at which very few trains stopped, the last up being ten o'clock, but about three miles off was a much more important place called Horsebridge, where plenty of trains stopped, both much later, and early in the morning. But at Bellfield the county member had a splendid house, and had erected an immense marquee in the grounds.

It was a very enthusiastic meeting, and lasted much later than I thought till it was fairly over, but whilst the usual votes of thanks and "buttering" were going on after the resolutions had been carried, I noticed on the platform quite a young fellow talking to one of the late speakers, so very good-looking that I could but glance again, and then I heard two old men behind me, who might be farmers perhaps, speaking of the same person—one apparently a native, the other a stranger who spoke.

"Yes, he's handsome—comes from the north—a good-looking family, I've heered say. Years ago, when he was a boy, he'd a distant cousin, an heiress, who was a wonderful pretty girl. Poor thing, she ended sadly though—sadly—sadly."

"Eh—how?" asked the native, whilst I listened amused.

I knew I had already lost the ten up train, so there was no hurry. Something more than mere amusement chained my attention shortly.

"Well," the other replied, "she married, I believe—Oh, twelve years ago, and in two years—so I've heered the story—she bolted with some fellow the husband hadn't never even suspected to exist."

"Dear, deary me—girls is awful skeery!" rejoined the native.
"Didn't he find her?"

"No—never turned up again, I believe; so she must ha' died they said!"

"H'm, it's queer, master, 'cause there's an old house a good way from this where some story like that belongs—years ago I've heard the boys gossip over it, as how the husband was like mad with grief an' rage when the lady went off one night, whilst he wor out, and the few servants over to Horsebridge Fair. And they said that the only thing she took off with her was her favourite dog. Ha, ha! odd, wasn't it?"

"Queer fancy—yes. What was their name? Might be the same feller likely enough," said the stranger.

"Lord, my memory's bad, master. I don't think I ever heered the name. What wor your lady's? Same as that lad's—her cousin's—I s'pose—eh?"

"Yes," was the reply; "she was a Miss Helen Clifford."

Do you know that dreadful feeling of being startled right through internally, which gives not the slightest outward sign or start, but which a minute or two after makes one feel a nerve-

lessness stealing swiftly over every fibre, and as if iced water were trickling through every blood-vessel from head to foot? I experienced this now, as my mind at once linked in one the two separate stories or episodes of yesterday and to-night. course it was absurd, utterly unreasonable of me, as I angrily and uselessly told myself, but when was ever the excited imagination driven from its ground by the dictating logic of My down-looking visitor had married an heiress, who had left him ten years ago, and this heiress, Helen Clifford, had married somebody and left him—also ten years ago! An odd coincidence at least, if they were different sets of people. Then again, that Fitzroy had shown extraordinary abject fear, not of dogs in general, but of my black pointer; his grandsire—also a black pointer—had been sold to a Miss Clifford, an heiress, and this Helen Clifford, who had left her husband from some house in this very neighbourhood, had taken with her a favourite dog —was that a black pointer, and had it perhaps ever bitten its master? Bah! what a commonplace, matter-of-fact explanation of all that had taken such hold of me. Even as I muttered that "That must be all, I supposed—what did it matter to any one then?" the memory of the man's awful face, and the look the unanimal, unhuman look in the dog's eyes—rushed upon me with a vivid horror that made me shiver in the soft Autumn air, as if a blast from the Frozen Ocean had struck me, as I walked through the grounds. I shook myself and stopped under a tree to eat a few of my biscuits and drink some of the sherry in my pocket-flask. Then I walked on briskly to the lodge gate—the last to leave, it seemed. I must now ask the way to Horsebridge Station, three miles off, which I did of the lodge-keeper, and thus instructed I passed out into the open road once more alone, but not for long. Merciful Heaven! not alone for long!

CHAPTER III.

MY UNSEEN COMPANION.

It was a glorious moonlight night, a full moon, high in the cloudless blue heavens, flooding the whole country beneath in the refulgence of its cold, ghastly light, so weird in its Sphinx-like, immoveable calm, so awesome in its intense silence—

pitilessly peaceful, passionless in its chilling purity. Darkness is never to me half so ghost-like as moonlight.

It was so still, far and near over the country—hill and dale and wooding—that it seemed as if all Nature lay sleeping, and even my own footstep on the path beside the road was so light that it made no perceptible sound. It was so beautiful a night that I could have wished I had double the distance to go, for each step, each breath of the sweet pure air, seemed to give new life after my long day's work.

My way, as directed, lay through winding lanes, sometimes quite in the open, sometimes shadowed by groves of trees. I had walked some distance, and had just emerged from one of these copses, when I fancied my ear caught a very, very slight sound in the wooding about twenty paces behind me. It was so slight, that I scarcely even glanced over my shoulder—it was fancy; perhaps a dry twig pattering down, or a dissipated young rabbit scuttling home, but still unconsciously my ear was on the qui vive. The next minute I heard it again, beyond any mistake—not the sound of footsteps, but a quick, light little patpat, pat-pat, as of some animal—a dog; and as I walked I looked back, expecting to see some stray canine ready to make friends with me.

THERE WAS NOTHING!

Nothing but my own shadow, and a broad flood of moonlight on the white road, that made even a twig or leaf distinctly visible. I think in that moment my very heart stood still, and my blood ceased to flow. I shall never forget that awful feeling, the dull, ghastly dread that crept into my inmost soul.

I stopped dead; it stopped too. I strode forward, and there it was again behind. I stamped each foot as I went to drown the sound, but through and between—half-a-dozen to each one of my long strides—it came on ceaselessly—that little, quick, eerie pat-pat, pat-pat. I should have heard it, I believe, through the roar of a cataract. Was I to have this awful companion all the way back to London? I hurried madly on for another half mile where the lane diverged into two, right and left. I was to follow the latter, but as I approached the fork, the little pitter-patter behind suddenly passed me, and went on before me, quite close, leading—I felt with a strange thrill—for me to follow, not the left, but the right-hand lane.

I stood still again for a moment. Up till now I had persistently tried to persuade myself that it must be only a fancy, an awful delusion, born of my vivid and excited imagination, so haunted by the singular events and coincidences of the last twenty-four hours, that it was only natural I should evolve the sound of a dog's footsteps, since one, if not two dogs, held the prominent place in the whole mystery—and that one, my dear Don, between whom and myself there existed such a strong affection and sympathy. Now I suddenly felt a strange, deep conviction that I was to follow-that I must follow-wherever the unseen, unearthly guide should lead me—that it was one with all that had recently so stirred me, and that I was a blind instrument in Higher Hands. With that conviction, the dull, superstitious dread died out, and a great awe fell on me in its place. I walked on quickly once more, following the distinct paw-steps, just ahead, my whole being throbbing with deep, intense excitement, but an excitement entirely different to what it had been before. As I followed I wondered if Don missed his master, and was watching eagerly for his return—in vain; whether he was thinking of me, with me—in the spirit—shall I say? Is that quite impossible? May there not be something in these higher "beasts that perish"—not of immortality, of course, but which whilst only co-existent with life, is yet above, beyond mere animal life? Man we know has body, soul and spirit, but may not an animal be endowed with some partial share of that wondrous, unseen, mysterious, spiritual existence within, which can pass from the material into the realm of the supernatural? What mystery is it which makes the dog susceptible to supernatural terrors, and unquestionably to very strong presentiments, both on his own and his master's behalf?

I was presently roused from theories to fact by the necessity of having to watch my footsteps more carefully, as the lane narrowed into a mere pathway through a thick, deep wood into which no moonlight penetrated, then came a glade—woods again—and at last it debouched into an open lane, leading, I saw at once, to the gates of some large grounds in which stood a house. But what grounds! what a house! utterly desolate, dilapidated, God-forgotten, as seamen forcibly express it.

The palings were broken, the gate, worm-eaten, had literally rotted away alike from hinges and lock, the grass was long and

rank; the shrubs and trees, unkempt for years, had straggled boughs and tendrils down to the ground, and shot up again into a thick underwood, as rank as the grass and weeds which overgrew the drive—once gravel—along which my eerie guide still led on right up to the house, a two-storeyed building that perhaps contained about fifteen rooms. Here again the same utter decay reigned; the walls were green with damp fungus, the windows broken, the hall door hanging only by the upper hinge. It looked like a place that had reeked with crime, and been accursed. I shuddered and paused on the mildewed steps. Must I enter? Yes; those pitiless footsteps went pit-pat across the wide, dust-begrimed hall, lighted by the moon's rays, and then suddenly ceased just within an open doorway at the end. I paused too, just without the threshold—and stopped. The moonlight poured in through an oriel window, and I saw that before me lay a large empty room, eaten with decay like the rest of the place, with a large marble mantel-piece, and the remains of what had been gold beading, round the ceiling and skirting. Opposite the hearth, too, there still remained, evidently let into the wall, a large mirror, reaching from the floor more than half way up the wall.

I listened intently—where was my terrible guide? I tried, shivering, to pierce each deeply shadowed corner, but in vain, and for a moment I put my hand across my dazed eyes; then I dropped it.

Great Heaven! was I mad—dreaming? Shall I ever forget the awful scene I witnessed that night, without the power to stir a finger?

There was the mirror, but in a bright, gilded frame, well matching the rich carpet and furniture that I saw now in the elegant room, and seated on the hearth was the pale ghost-like figure of a woman, both young and beautiful, richly robed in the fashion of ten years ago, and wearing a very large gold locket at her throat. I saw her turn her white face towards an opposite corner, and mechanically following that glance I saw, crouched upon an arm-chair, the similitude of a large, black pointer.

My blood ran cold; I was paralysed; I strove to call "Don," but no sound came to my lips—was that my grim guide? it had a broad silver collar on too. I looked again towards the pale figure on the hearth—there was another shadowy form behind

her now, a tall man's figure, the moonlight streaming full on the ghastly face, and the right hand stealing into his breast. My God! I knew it—him—that man who yesterday—— Why did not she look up and see what was in his devil's face? did not her sleeping dog awake and save her? As one does in a fearful nightmare, I strove in vain to move, to cry aloud to her, though all the time I knew that all this had been enacted ten long years ago. I saw the cold light gleam on a long glittering knife, as the figure, not seeing the dog, bent suddenly over the other figure's shoulder, and struck the weapon downwards to her She flung up her arms as she fell, and the murderer, stepping back with the reeking weapon, turned. In that instant, I beheld again in his ghastly face that awful look of mad fear I had seen yesterday—there on the chair stood that black pointer, pointing at him for one second, the next, it leaped straight at his throat as mine had done. He flung out his hand to ward off the attack—there was a hideous struggle—and then the noble beast fell back at his dead mistress's feet, stabbed, lifeless . . .

Then the figure of the assassin, still acting out the scene glided to that mirror, touched it heavily, and it slid back, disclosing a black vacuum—a grim charnel house, a grave—for he dragged both corpses into the secret hiding-place, flung in the weapon, and shut back the mirrored panel that concealed it and his fearful secret.

The spell broke! the tension that had held me gave way, and with a wild cry, I fell to the ground in a dead swoon.

CHAPTER IV.

"ON THE TRAIL."

"THANK Heaven he's coming round at last!"

That was the first sound which penetrated my ear, the sound of a deep, human voice once more, and some kindly hand held brandy to my lips.

"There, that's better, Sir; I thought you were dead almost, for you wouldn't come to—not for a solid half-hour."

The speaker was kneeling, supporting me against him; I was conscious of that now, and that a bright warm light like a huge round eye was glaring on both of us, and by it I saw that my new companion was a police-sergeant—a horse patrol.

"Thank you," I said faintly, "I shall be better directly."

My exhaustion was physical as well as mental, for I had eaten nothing since an hour before the meeting, and after the man had with kindly force made me swallow the wine and biscuits, which, it seems, had fallen out of my pocket, I was able to stand up, my natural vigour returning each moment.

"But how did you come to find me—here?" said I, looking round me with such a shudder, that he noticed it keenly I saw.

"I was passing, Sir, on my round at the end of the lane, when I heard a cry—such an awful cry as I never heard before, I'll swear, right from the wretched, haunted house, as they call it hereabouts. And I found you, Sir, lying like dead, though I saw no marks of either robbers or violence."

"No," I said, steadily, "but the people here may well shun this horrible place. I will tell you more presently, as I go with you to the police station at Horsebridge, but before we leave, there is something to be done. Answer me a question—do you know or remember anything of the people who last inhabited this place?"

"Not much, Sir, I wasn't here ten years ago, and people forget details so much, in time—still, I've heard my fellows talk about it sometimes. I believe it was bought by a gentleman who lived here about six months with his young wife."

"Ah, yes; and she had a pet dog, I hear," said I.

"Yes, she had, Sir, a black pointer, though I never saw one."

"They are very rare, but I have a splendid black pointer myself," I said.

"Indeed, Sir. Well, the story is that one morning, just after the Fair, he came over to our station just wild as wild could be, to give information that while he was out, and all the servants allowed to go to the Fair, his wife had eloped and took the dog; he described her, the gentleman he suspected, and the pointer; and every step was to be taken to trace them. They say he started to London himself, but no one never traced the fugitives. It was fancied they'd been seen on a Dover boat, but it wasn't confirmed, and the husband, I believe, came back, sent all the furniture off to auction, shut up the house and went abroad—never even sold or let the place."

"No," I answered, sternly, "he dared not part with it. I tell you that his wife never left here; he murdered her and her dog here—on that hearth there—the last night of Horsebridge Fair!"

"Good heavens, Sir! What are you saying!" exclaimed the man, falling back a step.

"A terrible truth, Sergeant, which I will prove. Do you know this man's name?"

"No, sir," he was watching me, I could see, suspiciously. "It's been forgot, I suppose, about here: do you know?"

"Yes, I do; it is Fitzroy, and his poor wife's was Helen Clifford, but up till yesterday morning I knew nothing of even the existence of such people. Now, bring your lantern and truncheon here, to this mirror. It is the door, in fact, of a small secret chamber in the wall, and I call upon you, as a constable, to break open that door, for within lie the murdered woman and dog, and the knife with which they were stabbed! Strike here, where the spring is," I touched about the spot on the frame, "perhaps it will slide back."

Without a word he obeyed, and struck the old worm-eaten frame; there was a little shower of wood-dust, making a hole. At the second blow, something cracked, and the aperture was enlarged. The Sergeant then put his hand in the gap, and slowly forced the panel back—back, and lifting his lantern, threw the light full into the deep recess disclosed.

We were strong men, both, but our very flesh seemed to creep as our eyes met in dumb horror for minutes.

"It's too awful, Sir," he whispered hoarsely, "but—I must do my duty."

There before us lay—not a corpse, but a grinning skeleton, with the remains of rich feminine robes still clinging about it, and golden hair falling over it. The gold bracelets on the fleshless arms, the wedding-ring still on the fleshless hand, the large locket still suspended to the bare bone that had once been so rounded a throat—had I not seen it all two hours, or less, back? Partly over the feet of the murdered mistress, where the brutal assassin's hand had flung it, lay the body of the noble dog that had striven to avenge her—that surely had now avenged her in God's own mysterious way; the once glossy black hide clung about the skeleton, the silver collar still on the poor animal's throat.

"You recognize both, sir?" said the officer, instantly catching my expression.

"Yes"; it was all I could say just then.

He gave me the lantern to hold, and, taking out his note-book wrote down notes of all that had passed; next he searched for the weapon I had mentioned, and discovered it in a corner, a long, fine, sharp clasp-knife, with something, I saw, engraved on a plate. It—the haft and the blade—was deeply stained with dried-up blood.

"Sure enough, Sir," said the man, "as true as my name is John Vane, here's his name, as you said, 'Maurice Fitzroy'. He never dreamed it'd be found in this kind of grave. Mind, sir, you're witness to all we find. I'm going to take possession of this, and these trinkets."

A grim job, I thought, as Vane did so; bracelets, locket, ring, dog-collar. Then we examined them. On the latter we found "H. Clifford."

"It was her dog," I said; " not his."

The locket Mrs. Fitzroy had worn contained on one side an oval photo of herself—oh, so lovely!—on the other, her husband—ten years younger, but the very man I knew. I could have sworn to him anywhere. The name was written to each likeness. The Sergeant carefully put all these articles in his pocket, shutting the knife, of course, and then said, "The sooner now we get back to Horsebridge, the better."

"It's four miles off, Sir," he said, "and as you look quite worn, you must mount my horse and I'll walk."

I was, in truth, so exhausted by all I had gone through, that I was glad to accept the kind offer, and oh! how thankful to leave the scene of the dark crime I had witnessed repeated; how blessed was the new day, the first golden light of the rising sun.

On the way I made up my mind that, extraordinary as the actual truth was, it would be unquestionably my best course to tell the Inspector and the Magistrate the whole story from the time Fitzroy came into my office yesterday morning. I should, of course, have to accompany the officer who was sent with the warrant to arrest the murderer, as I must identify him. They might, or might not, believe the strange intervention of the black pointer, but the facts to which it led were undeniable. Fortunately, so Vane informed me, Horsebridge was within the Metropolitan district and therefore the warrant of the Magistrate there would require no further endorsement to be executed in London, where,

as far as I knew, Fitzroy was living—my agent knew where, I believed. The thing was to get the warrant, and go up to Town as early as possible.

At three o'clock we reached the police station, and when the Inspector had taken my deposition and heard my story (which neither he nor Vane received with ridicule), it was arranged that I should go to the Railway Hotel for some refreshment and rest, and then the Sergeant was to come for me before eight to get the warrant, and start with me for King's Cross by an early train.

When he came, I was quite myself again, but before leaving I went into the station and telegraphed to my wife to be on the down platform at King's Cross at ten, when I would meet her. I knew I could not possibly go home till evening, as, directly the terrible business was ended, I must go to my work.

I told Vane on our way to the Magistrate, that my own strong suspicion was that Fitzroy was planning exactly the same horrible game over again, and meant to make my house the scene of the second wife's murder, on account of the hidden room that had so taken him.

"Well, Sir, then he won't get the chance, for he'll swing for this. Good Lord! Mr. Albemarle, what a blaze this extraordinary mysterious story will make. It makes me creep to think of that black pointer of yours knowing the murderer; and that other too! It's these that found it out—nothing human."

"It's the hand of God, indeed," I answered.

CHAPTER V.

"MY BLACK POINTER."

ACCOMPANIED by Sergeant Vane in plain clothes, I reached King's Cross at ten, and we went round at once to the down platform, my heart beating fast, all the horrors of the past night forgotten in the joyful expectation of seeing my fair young wife again. I had not gone many steps when I saw the pretty form I sought sitting on a seat, and to my utter surprise, holding Don in a chain.

"I see Mrs. Albemarle," I said quickly, and my companion, with respectful courtesy, directly dropped back a few paces. Anna was looking the other way, and dear old Don scented or saw me first, and with a bound that tore the chain from her light

hold, rushed upon me with a frantic joy that attracted the attention of those near.

"Dear old boy—so!—quiet, Don," I said patting him, and then taking up the chain as Anna hurried up.

"Oh, Wilford."

Our hands clasped, how closely we best knew, and then I asked her what had made her bring the dog.

"He would come, Will," said she, in an almost frightened way, "he's been so strange all night, after eleven—Why how you started! What is it?"

No wonder I should—that was the very time I had first heard the pit-pat of the dog behind me.

"Nothing, dear-go on; what do you mean by 'strange'?"

"Well, for an hour or more, he would keep patting round and round the room so oddly—well, as if he hardly wanted to be heard—until after twelve——"

"And then, Anna?" I felt the cold perspiration on my forehead.

"Then he jumped on your chair and curled up, and I went to bed. Then this morning, the minute I began getting ready to come he kept at my skirts—looking, oh, *dreadfully* human at me, Wilford—and when I told him, 'No, he must not come,' he actually got before me, and stood in my way, still begging so very strongly that—that I got stupid, dear, and nervous—dogs do have presentiments, don't they?—and so I got his chain and took him in the hansom."

"You were right, dear wife," I said, so gravely that she looked at me. "I have a strange tale to tell you directly. Ah, Heaven!—what is the matter, Don?"

I might well be startled into the exclamation, for the pointer suddenly laid his nose to the ground with a deep growl—the next moment he had leaped the length of the chain with a force that actually swung me round as he strained furiously to dash forwards towards the entrance of the booking office, just as out of it, on to the platform, ticket in hand, came—Maurice Fitzroy!

I shall never forget that moment, or his face, if I lived a hundred years. He stood as yesterday — paralysed; the constable stepped forwards, as I forcibly shortened Don's chain, and touched my hand.

"Yes—it is right," dropped from my lips. Vane laid his hand at once on the man's shoulder, whilst Anna shrank up to me in

alarmed wonder—the more that several people now had paused to gaze at what was passing.

"Mr. Fitzroy, I am a police officer, and you are my prisoner," said Vane quietly.

I never saw human face turn so ashen pale, so lividly bloodless, as this man's, never saw such blank terror in human eyes, as his went from me and the dog, now crouching at my feet, to the constable.

"What extraordinary mistake is this?" he demanded hoarsely.
"I am going to visit the lady I am engaged to, and must not miss my train. You have made some mistake. What do you dare to charge me with in this manner.

There was a door hard by, marked "Office,"—one of the rail-way official's offices, and Vane said:

"Come in here, sir, quietly, unless you want a crowd, and take care what you say, as it will be used in evidence. Come quietly, if you're wise."

We all went in, Vane saying to the one clerk at the desk: "It's all right. Send a porter for a policeman." Then he turned to his prisoner again.

"Now, sir, you are charged with the murder of your wife ten years ago, near Horsebridge—the last night of the Fair."

Fitzroy actually staggered back, flinging out his hand with the frantic action of terror I knew.

"It is false—false!" he cried out, "A lie, I tell you! She fled that night."

"You have sheltered yourself too long under that base slander," said I sternly, "you murdered both Helen Clifford your wife, and her black pointer, and hid their bodies in the recess behind the mirror, where we found them last night."

"You dare accuse me, curse you," said Fitzroy in a fierce hoarse whisper, "you and that—that black pointer there. Where is your warrant between you all?"

As he said that I saw him look round as if for some exit—so did Vane. I put my trembling wife into a chair, and instinctively eased off the length of Don's chain. Vane said coolly:

"When another constable is here, I'll read the warrant. Any attempt to escape will be worse than useless, for, if you could elude us, that dog would seize you."

As he spoke the clerk, with a constable, and the platform inspector came in, and then the Sergeant produced the warrant.

Whilst he read it over I spoke to Anna in a low tone; she entreated me not to send her home alone as I must go on to Bow Street—she would much rather remain with me—and as she was not one of those women who faint or shriek, I consented.

In a few minutes the two constables with their prisoner drove off in a close cab for Bow Street, and I and my wife with Don followed in a hansom. On the way I told Anna the whole grim story, for in court, of course, only sufficient evidence need be adduced for the committal of the accused man.

* * * * * * *

I think that none of those connected with that cause célèbre, when it came on, will ever forget it to their dying day.

Fitzroy made a desperate attempt to prove the story he had circulated all these years, but it was too lame as against the weight of evidence. The motive was very plain, for by Helen's death-childless-he under her will, dated a year after their marriage, became sole and absolute possessor of her fortune, which he had now almost run through, it appeared. Setting aside the supernatural intervention which had so mysteriously led to the unearthing of the crime, the facts so discovered were dead against him, even to his extraordinary terror of my dog-the descendant of the slain pointer. The dog's collar, with Helen's name, the locket containing Helen's and her husband's photos and names, the knife with his name, the false tale he had told, the deliberate way he had cleared the house of servants, the very leaving the house neglected ever since—all made a chain there was no breaking, and the verdict of "Guilty" was received with acclamation.

Justice was done at last, and the Divine Command, "whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed" fulfilled.

* * * * * * * *

The wretched murderer would not hear the chaplain, and his very last words on the scaffold were a savage threat, which, however, admitted his guilt:

"If I were free for one hour I would use it to kill Wilford Albemarle and his demon dog, as I killed Helen Clifford and the Black Pointer!"

Caulfield's Crime.

BY A. PERRIN.

CAULFIELD was the worse-tempered fellow I ever met, or even heard of, which is saying a good deal.

He was sulky and vindictive, as well as passionately violent; and yet he was a great friend of mine. People in Koorwallah said it didn't speak well for me, and made remarks about "birds of a feather," with much appreciation of their own discernment.

I suppose, now I come to think of it, that it perhaps may have looked odd for a young civilian like myself, newly landed in India, to be seen so constantly with a man who was senior major in his regiment, and getting on for twenty years older than I was.

Everyone wondered openly what we could find in common to make us such friends; they were sure we could not think alike on any one subject, and it afforded them food for a little uncharitable gossip, which is always a god-send in a secondclass up-country station in the North-West Provinces.

No one in Koorwallah knew Caulfield well. Everybody seemed half afraid of him except myself, and there was no denying that he certainly was not the kind of man whose rooms one could walk into without asking, and say "Hullo!" pick up a book or a paper, wander round, looking at the photographs of his sisters, or other fellows' sisters, and then go out again. Not one of the subalterns in his regiment ever spoke to him voluntarily, none of the ladies liked him, they said he was so rude and disagreeable, and never accepted their invitations, and they were sure he had a history, which was very probable and not unusual.

As a matter of fact, he had only lately exchanged into the —th Foot from a cavalry regiment, nobody knew why, nor did he volunteer any information, which deepened the air of mystery surrounding him.

As for myself, I had struck up a friendship with him almost immediately after my arrival in the station. His bungalow was next to mine. They were both ordinary little thatched and whitewashed bachelor's houses, with narrow strips of verandah in front, where a servant was generally to be seen, either washing

up plates and throwing the dirty water into the drive, or cleaning the lamps and anointing the floor with kerosene oil.

We each had an untidy square of compound, divided from the others by a dusty aloe hedge, in the roots of which lurked pinknosed little mongooses, with their numerous and ever-increasing families.

There was very little work for me to do during the first two months while I was getting used to the language and the people, and I had ample time for sauntering over to Caulfield's bungalow to examine, with intense interest, his enormous collection of skins and horns and other sporting trophies, which were enough to make any youngster who knew how to handle a gun turn green with envy. He would sit quietly smoking in his chair, and watch me wander round, touching all his favourite treasures, and listening to my voluble chatter with irritating stolidity. He never asked me to come, or pressed me to stay, and yet, in some inexplicable manner, I felt that my visits were not unwelcome to him, except on one or two memorable occasions, when I found him in his worst mood, and he turned me out with a promptitude which caused me to show my face at his door somewhat cautiously the next time I invaded his privacy.

He certainly could not have been called an agreeable companion, and, looking back over the stretch of years which divides those young days of mine from the present, I often wonder what strange fascination drew me so persistently to seek his company. He attracted and interested me, I had a craving to be thought well of by him. I told him petty details concerning my home and family, I read him my people's letters, I confided to him that there was "a girl at home," and I cannot remember receiving anything in the way of encouragement to continue, save an occasional grunt of acquiescence, and sometimes contempt.

He never asked me questions or told me anything about himself, and yet there was a quiet strength in his manner which gave one a secure feeling that whatever confidence was thrust upon him, it would not be betrayed, however ungraciously he might choose to receive it.

Caulfield never went to church. He generally spent his Sundays out shooting, always going off by himself, and returning with a magnificent bag. He had never been known to invite

anyone to accompany him, for he was madly jealous on the subject of sport, and nothing made him more angry than to hear of another fellow having shot anything that might be called game. He seemed to look upon each jheel,* and every patch of hunting-ground, in the neighbourhood of Koorwallah as his own particular property.

So it may be understood that I was fully alive to the honour conferred on me, when he unexpectedly asked me to go out with him for a three days' shoot.

"I know of a string of jheels," he said, "about thirty miles from here, where the duck and snipe ought to swarm. I saw the spot and marked it down, when I was out black-buck shooting, last week. I've made all arrangements for going out Saturday morning. You can come, too, if you like."

Needless to say, I jumped at this offer. Caulfield had the reputation of being the best shot in the N. W. P. He knew instinctively where game was likely to be found. Good sport was almost a certainty in his company, and, as far as I knew, I was the only fellow he had ever voluntarily invited to go with him.

I boasted about it in the club that evening, and was mercilessly squashed by two or three men who would have given their ears to know the whereabouts of the string of jheels, but who jealously warned me to be careful that Caulfield wasn't after big game, and that he did not begin the expedition by shooting me.

"He'd as soon shoot a man, as anything else," said our doctor, looking over his shoulder to make sure that Caulfield was not in the room. "I never met such a nasty, bad-tempered chap. I believe he's mad!"

And the doctor went on with his billiards, feeling that this speech had wiped off a few old scores he had treasured up against Caulfield for sundry disagreeables which had passed between them.

I left all the arrangements of our expedition to Caulfield. He requested me not to interfere when I began suggesting various things I considered might be useful; and after giving me to understand that I was to be his guest for the three days in question, he despatched a couple of carts on the Friday with a tent wherein we were to eat and sleep, various provisions and

^{*} A large tract of marsh.

cooking utensils, a pair of camp beds, and some servants, my bedding and bearer being my only contributions to the arrangements.

We rode out the thirty miles on Saturday morning, each having sent a fresh pony on half way, and by this means did the distance in about three hours and a half. Our tent was pitched in the midst of a patch of what is called dâk jungle, clusters of stunted-looking trees with thick, dry bark, and flat shapeless leaves that clattered noisily against each other when stirred by the wind.

It was not a cheerful spot. The soil was principally "usar," that is to say largely mixed with bitter salt which works its way to the surface, and prevents anything but the coarsest of vegetation growing in it. The ground was low and marshy, and the stillness of the air was only broken now and then by the discordant cries of the large jheel birds as they waded majestically in the patches of water in search of their breakfast of small fish.

Caulfield was a different man out there to what he had been in the station. He talked and laughed and acted showman with the most intense satisfaction. He led me away from amongst the stunted trees, and showed me a great sheet of water in the distance, broken in places by little bushy islands and dark patches of reeds, and a mud-coloured native village on the top of a mound overlooking the water at the extreme left.

It was still early, as we had started before six o'clock, and the sun had barely cleared away the thick heavy mist, which was still rising here and there, and rapidly dispersing as the heat increased.

"Isn't it a lovely spot!" said Caulfield, laughing. "Beyond that village the snipe ought to rise from the rice fields in thousands. There's another jheel away to the right of this, and another joining that. We shan't be able to shoot it all in three days, worse luck, and besides it's too big really for only two guns. Come in to breakfast, we mustn't lose time."

An hour later, and we had started. Our guns over our shoulders and a couple of servants behind us carrying the cartridge bags and our luncheon.

We were both in good spirits. We felt we had the certainty of an excellent day's shooting in prospect. But, alas! Luck was against us. The birds were unaccountably wild and few and far between. Some one had been there before us was

Caulfield's verdict, delivered with disappointed rage, and after tramping and wading all day, we returned weary and crestfallen with only six teal and a mallard between us.

It was undoubtedly very provoking, but Caulfield seemed to take the matter much more to heart than there was any occasion to do. He was filled with hatred of the "scoundrels," who had discovered his pet place and played havoc among the birds, and after dinner sat cursing his luck and the culprits who had spoilt our sport until we were both too sleepy to keep awake any longer, and after our long day of exercise in the open air we neither of us moved in our beds till we were called the next morning.

We had breakfast, and started off, taking a different direction to the previous day, but with no better luck. On and on, and round and round we tramped, with only an occasional shot here and there, scarcely worth mentioning.

At last, about three o'clock in the afternoon, we sat wearily down to eat our luncheon. I was ravenously hungry, and greedily devoured my share of the provisions, but Caulfield hardly ate a mouthful; he sat moodily examining his gun, and taking long pulls now and then at his flask of whiskey.

We were seated on the roots of a huge tamarind tree, close to the village I had noticed on our arrival the morning before. We had been a very long round and had kept the yellow mud walls, on the top of the little mound, in sight as a land-mark. The village was a mile or so from our camp, but there was still a good deal of ground to be shot over between the two.

The place seemed but poorly inhabited, and had a dreary, deserted look about it. Two very old women were sitting watching us with dim, weary eyes, leaning their bent backs against the crumbling mud wall, and a few naked children were playing near them, while one or two bigger boys were driving a herd of lean, bony cattle down towards the water.

Presently another figure came slowly in sight, and advanced towards us. It was a fakir, or holy man, as was evident by the tawny masses of wool which were plaited in amongst his own black locks, and allowed to hang down on either side of his thin, sharp face, the ashes which covered his almost naked body, and the hollow gourd for alms which he held in one hand. His face was long and dog-like, and his pointed yellow teeth glistened in

the sun as he demanded money in a dismal, monotonous kind of chant.

Caulfield flung a pebble at him and told him roughly to be off. The fakir fixed his wild, restless eyes on him for one moment with a look of bitter animosity, and then walked away, disappearing behind a clump of tall feathery grass.

I felt in my pocket. I had no coins, or I should certainly have given the poor wretch whatever I might have had about me.

"Did you notice that brute's face?" said Caulfield as we rose, preparatory to starting off again. "If there's any truth in the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, he must have been a pariah dog in his former state. He was exactly like one!"

"A jackal more likely," I said carelessly. "It was the face of a wild beast."

Then we walked on again, skirting round the village, and plunging into the damp, soft rice fields. We put up a wisp of snipe which we followed till we had shot them nearly all, and then presently, to our joy, we heard a rush of wings overhead, and a lot of duck went down into a corner of the jheel ahead of us.

"We've got them," whispered Caulfield, in excitement, and we cautiously crept on till the birds were in sight, floating lazily on the still, cold water, pluming their feathers, and calling to one another in their fancied security.

"Now," said Caulfield, crouching down behind the rushes.
"Fire into the brown!"

We both raised our guns, and as our fingers were actually on the trigger, there was a mighty splash in the middle of the ducks, and rising with a whir-r·r, they were out of shot in a second.

Caulfield swore. So did I. And then we both turned to see what had caused the splash.

A little way behind us stood the fakir we had seen at luncheon-time. In one hand he was still holding the fragments of the clod of earth he had thrown into the water to warn the ducks of our approach.

Caulfield shook his fist at the man, and abused him freely in Hindustani, but without moving a muscle of his face he turned slowly and disappeared into the jungle. Words would not describe Caulfield's rage and disappointment.

"They were pintail, nearly all of 'em," he said, "and the first decent chance we've had to-day. To think of that beastly fakir spoiling it all! What a devilish thing to do!"

"They hate anything being killed, you know," I remarked consolingly, "and I expect there was some spite in it too, because you threw a stone at him."

"Bosh!" said Caulfield. "Come along, we must make haste, it'll be dark soon. I should like to try a place over by those palms before we knock off, but we may as well let the servants go back now, they've had a hard day. Have you got some cartridges in your pocket?"

"Yes, plenty," I answered, and after despatching the two men back to the camp with what little game we had got, we turned to the right and walked in silence till we saw more water glistening between the rough stems of the palms, and in it, to our surprise and delight, a multitude of duck and teal.

With our guns in our hands, we quietly crept towards the water, holding our breath, and fearing that the slightest noise might awake the ducks' suspicions.

The sun had begun to sink in a red ball, and there was a hush over the land as the air became heavy with damp, and the mist stole over the cold still waters of the jheel. Overhead came the first faint cackle of the wild geese, returning home for the night.

Caulfield raised his gun first. He was taking a very steady aim into the middle of the fluttering brown mass of feathers.

Splash! Whir-r-r! A cloud of wings rose in front of us, and wheeled bodily to the right, and the air resounded with the cries of the startled birds.

Someone had thrown a heavy stone in amongst them just as Caulfield had been going to fire.

He turned round very deliberately and looked behind him. Following the direction of his eyes, I saw the long, lanky figure of the fakir, his yellow, jagged teeth and white eye-balls glistening in the pink glow of the setting sun, and a look of fiendish triumph and exultation on his face.

Then there was a loud report, and the next thing I saw was a quivering body on the ground, and wild, terrified eyes staring wide open at me in the agony of death. Caulfield had shot the fakir.

I shudder when I recall what followed.

The man had been shot through the heart, and died almost immediately, without a sound, save one long, harrowing sigh.

Caulfield stood looking down at what he had done, while I knelt by the body trying hopelessly to persuade myself that life was not extinct. He seemed half-dazed, and it was fully ten minutes before I was able to make him realize what had happened, and the necessity for prompt action.

"You know what it means," he said, touching the body with his foot, "killing a native is no joke in these days. I should come out of it badly. You were witness that I deliberately shot that poor devil. What do you intend doing?"

He spoke in a hard, defiant voice, but there was anxiety written on every line of his features.

"Of course I'll stick by you," I said, after a moment's silence, "nobody need ever know about—about *this* but ourselves, but we shall have to get rid of it."

I gazed at the body with horror. The face, which was becoming rigid, looked more like that of an animal than ever. Caulfield shivered, and glanced uneasily round him.

"Look here," I said, with an effort, "we can't do anything this minute. We'd better hide it in that grass, and come back after dinner. We must get a spade or something of the kind."

"Very well," said Caulfield, humbly. All his old masterful manner had disappeared, and he obeyed me like a child.

Then, when we had performed the repugnant task, and the body had been thrust into the thick grass and covered with clods of hard, dry soil, we walked back to our camp in silence.

I looked at Caulfield as we entered the lighted tent, and could not but feel compassion for him.

His diabolical temper had led him to commit this atrocious deed, and very bitter was the reaction.

He was white and shaking, and looked ten years older than when we had started out that morning.

I gave him some whiskey, and we both sat down and pretended to eat our dinner. We waited for half-an-hour afterwards, to prevent the servants noticing anything peculiar in our manner, and then I sent my bearer outside to see if the moon had risen.

"Yes, sahib," he answered, coming back "it is as light as day."

During the few seconds of his absence, I had hastily filled the deep pocket of my overcoat with a stout hunting-knife, which I had packed amongst my traps in case we should get any buck shooting, and also a small kitchen chopper left lying on the floor by the bearer after hammering a stiff joint of my camp bed together. I dared not ask the servants for any kind of implement with which to dig.

We left the tent carelessly, as if we were going for a stroll, and found that it was, as the bearer had reported, "as light as day." People who have never been out of England cannot readily imagine the brilliancy of Eastern moonlight. It is almost possible to read by it.

We walked slowly at first, but rapidly quickened our pace as we left the tent behind us, and we both breathed hard as we neared the spot we were making for. Caulfield stopped once or twice, and I half thought he meant to turn back and leave me to do the ghastly business alone. But he came on by my side and never spoke a word until we were close to the tall, coarse grass which hid the fakir's body. Then he suddenly clutched my arm.

"God in Heaven!" he whispered, pointing forwards, "what is that?"

I thought he had gone out of his mind, and it was with difficulty that I refrained from shouting aloud.

The next moment I distinctly saw something moving exactly over the spot where we had concealed the body. I am not what is called a coward, but I must confess that I burst out into a cold perspiration.

There was a rustling in the grass, accompanied by a scraping sound, and Caulfield and I stepped forwards in desperation. I parted the grass with my hands and looked down. There, lying on the fakir's body was a large jackal, grinning and snarling at having been disturbed over his hideous meal.

"Drive it away," whispered Caulfield hoarsely.

But the brute refused to move. Silently it sat there showing its yellow teeth, and reminded me horribly of the wretched man that lay dead beneath its feet. I turned sick and faint.

Then Caulfield shouted at it, and shook the grass, and lifted one of the clods of soil to throw at it.

The jackal rose slowly, and began to slink away. It passed

close enough for us both to notice that it was an unusually large animal for its kind, and moreover had lost one of its ears. Its coat was plentifully besprinkled with grey, and was rough and mangy.

For more than an hour we worked as if our lives depended on it, using the chopper and my hunting-knife, and being helped by a rift in the ground where the soil had been softened by water running from the jheel, and at last we stood up and stamped down the earth which now covered all traces of Caulfield's crime, with the sweat pouring off our faces.

We had filled the grave with large stones which were lying about on the ground, remnants of some ancient Buddhist temple, long ago forgotten and deserted, so we felt secure that it could not easily be disturbed by animals.

The next morning we returned to Koorwallah, and the secret between Caulfield and myself drew us closer together than before. I suppose what I had seen him do ought to have repulsed and alienated me from him, but the night of that terrible burial we had sat up, one on each side of our little camp table, until daylight crept across the jheels, and Caulfield had told me the story of his life.

It cannot be written down here, but there was the burden of a cruel sorrow in it that explained much to me in his behaviour which I had never understood before.

I passionately pitied the lonely, unloved man, who had brought much of his misery on himself, both now and in the past, through his own ungovernable anger.

He shut himself up more than ever after this, and entirely gave up his shooting trips, which before had been the pleasure of his life, and the only person he ever spoke to, unofficially, was myself.

He took to coming into my bungalow in the evening and sometimes in the middle of the night, and would walk restlessly up and down my rooms, or sit in an easy chair with his face buried in his hands. At times I feared his mind was going, and I dreaded the effect upon him of the long hot-weather days and nights that were creeping gradually nearer.

The end of April came, with its plague of insects and scorching wind. The hours grew long and heavy with the heat, and the dust storms howled and swirled over the baking little station,

bringing perhaps a few tantalizing drops of rain, or more often leaving the air hotter than ever and thick with copper-coloured dust.

I grew more and more anxious about Caulfield, especially when he came over to me one night when it was too hot to sleep, and asked me if he might stay in my bungalow till the morning.

"I know I may seem an ass," he said, "but I can't stay by myself. I get all sorts of beastly ideas."

I thought he meant that he was tempted to take his own life, and began to try and cheer him up, telling him scraps of gossip, and encouraging him to talk, when a sound outside made us both start. It was only the weird, plaintive cry of a jackal, but Caulfield sprang to his feet shaking all over.

"There it is!" he exlaimed hoarsely, "it's followed me over here. Jack," he continued, turning his haggard, sleepless eyes on me, "every night for the last week that brute has come and howled round my house. You know what I mean. It's the one we saw that night."

He was terribly excited, and, I could see, almost off his head. "Nonsense, my dear chap," I said, pushing him back into the chair, "you've got fever. Jackals come round my house and howl all night, and all day too. That's nothing."

"Look here, Jack," said Caulfield, very calmly, "I've no more fever than you have, and if you think I'm delirious you're mistaken." Then he lowered his voice, "I looked out one night and saw it, and I tell you it had only one ear."

In spite of my own common sense, and the certainty that Caulfield was not himself, my blood ran cold, and, after I had succeeded in quieting him and getting him to sleep on my bed, I lay on the sofa going over every detail of that fearful night in the jungle again and again, try as I would to chase it from my thoughts.

Once or twice after this Caulfield came to me and repeated the same tale. He swore he was being haunted by the jackal we had driven away from the fakir's body, and took it into his head that the soul of the man he had murdered had entered into the animal, and was trying to obtain vengeance in that form.

Then he suddenly stopped coming near me, and when I went to see him he would hardly speak, and seemed to take no pleasure in my visits as formerly. I thought perhaps he was offended because I had always laughed at his hallucinations, and treated them as, what they undoubtedly must have been, mère fancies.

I urged him to see a doctor or take leave, but he angrily refused to do either, and declared I should very soon drive him mad altogether if I bothered him much more.

After this I left him alone for a couple of days, and on the third night, when my conscience was pricking me for having neglected him, and I was preparing to go over to his bungalow, his bearer came rushing in with a face of terror and distress, and begged me to come at once. He had already sent a man off for the doctor, as he feared his master was very ill. I arrived at Caulfield's bungalow just as the doctor, who lived only across the road, appeared, and together we entered the queer museum of a house, literally lined with horns and skins and curiosities. Caulfield was lying unconscious on his bed.

"He had a kind of fit, sahib," said the trembling bearer, and proceeded to explain how his master had behaved.

The doctor bent over the bed.

"Do you happen to know if he's been bitten by a dog, or anything lately?" he said, looking up at me.

"Not to my knowledge," I answered, but the faint wail of a jackal out across the plain struck a superstitious chill to my heart.

For twenty-four hours we stayed with him, watching the terrible struggles we were powerless to avert, and which lasted until the end came, and brought a merciful peace to the poor, harassed mind and body.

He was never able to speak after the first paroxysm, which had occurred before we arrived, so we could not learn from him whether he had ever been bitten or not, neither could the doctor discover any kind of scar on his body which might have been made by the teeth of an animal, and yet there was no doubt that Caulfield's death was due to hydrophobia.

As we stood in the next room after all was over, drinking the dead man's whiskey and soda (which we badly needed), we questioned the bearer again and again, but he could tell us little or nothing. His master did not keep dogs, and he did not know of his ever having been bitten by one, but there had been a mad jackal about the place nearly three weeks before, though he did not think his master had known of it.

"It couldn't have been that," said the doctor, "or we should have heard about it."

"No," I answered mechanically, "it couldn't have been that."

It was nearly three weeks ago that Caulfield had ceased to come near me and had taken such a strange dislike to my going to his house. I began to think I must be going off my head too, for nobody but a lunatic could for a moment have seriously entertained such a notion as crossed my brain at that moment.

I went into the bedroom to take a last look at poor Caulfield's thin, white face, with its ghastly, hunted expression, and to give a farewell pressure to his cold, heavy hand before I left him, for the doctor had urged me to go home, saying that there was now nothing more that I could do to help him. I picked up a lantern after this, and stepped out into the dark verandah.

As I did so, something came silently round the corner of the house, and stood in my path.

I raised my lantern, and caught a glimpse of a mass of grey fur, two fiery yellow eyes, and glistening teeth. I saw that it was only a stray jackal, and struck at it with my stick, but instead of running away, it passed silently by me and entered Caulfield's room. The light fell on the animal's head as it entered the open door—one of its ears was missing.

In a frenzy I rushed back into the house, calling loudly for the doctor and the servants.

"I saw a jackal come in here!" I exclaimed excitedly, searching round Caulfield's room. "It must be in this room—I saw it go in this very minute. Hunt it out at once!"

Every nook and corner was examined, but there was no jackal, nor even a trace of one.

"Go home to bed, my boy," said the doctor, looking at me kindly. "This business has shaken your nerves. Keep quiet for a bit. Your imagination's beginning to play you tricks. Good-night."

"Good-night," I answered, wearily, and I went slowly back to my bungalow, trying to persuade myself that he was right.

By Act of Parliament,

6 AND 7 EDWARD 15TH, ANNO DOMINI 2041.
BY HELEN HOPPNER COODE.

IN TWO PARTS.
PART I.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOPE FAMILY—AN HISTORICAL SURVEY.

On a fine May morning, in 3091, Marcia Hope walked into the breakfast-room of a handsome house in Guelph Square. There was an unusual look of thought on her face, which cleared away as she walked to the window. She opened it, and stepped out on to the balcony, commanding a view which if deficient in grand and striking features, is, in soft and smiling beauty, one of the most perfect in the world.

Guelph Square was then comparatively new, having been built of the materials of the old Houses of Parliament, an inconvenient, ugly and unhealthy building, recently condemned and demolished by order of the ædile for Westminster.

She looked over the embankment across the silver Thames to the banks beyond, studded here and there with Italian villas embowered in their quaint pretty gardens, then to the southeast quarter beyond, all sweet, fertile meadow land. Bermondsey, with its sub-tropical gardens, well protected from the east winds by grand forest trees, was conspicuous by its tender green. Then she glanced at the stately piles of Bethlehem College (built on the site of the hospital now no longer required), and at Southwark Palace, the residence of the Prince of Wales, and at the noble woods of Rotherhithe, planted to drain the low-lying lands adjacent to the now useless docks.

She looked down upon the river. The air was very still, and the surface like a mirror, save where a slight splash, from which an ever-widening circle spread, showed where a salmon had snapped at an incautious fly.

Anon, a stately swan, followed by her brood of homely-looking cygnets, destined one day to become types of loveliness and

elegance like their parents, came slowly down the stream. This was a sight Marcia could never look on with indifference. The beautiful mother glided on, now dipping her head into the cool lucent water, now pausing and looking at her brood as if to assure herself of their safety and fondly stroking their grey downy backs with her bill, while they followed her, fussily chippering and papping at the broad leaves of the water-lilies.

"Pretty creature, she can at least keep her young ones to herself," thought Marcia.

The swan came to a halt nearly opposite to the spot where Marcia was standing, and summoning her brood soon disappeared among the osiers and rushes on the river bank.

Marcia still paused, drinking in the sweet fresh air, and looking again at the lovely landscape spread out before her. A smile stole over her face.

"How beautiful!" thought she. "What a country! How wisely, how nobly governed! To think that within the memory of living man, this beautiful river was a dark, turgid stream, redolent of dirt and foulness, and that yonder banks were hideous with ugly factories, and that the very air, now blowing fresh and pure from mid ocean, and laden with health and vigour, was poisoned by gas, smoke, and the very breath of thousands of wretched sickly human beings. What am I, what are thousands such as I, that I should interfere with laws that have made life so beautiful for the mass? And yet——"

In spite of Marcia's philosophy something very like a sob rose to her throat. She hastily turned away, and busied herself with preparations for the family breakfast.

The Hopes were a wealthy family, and among the first to avail themselves of improvements then new, but which to us seem old-fashioned and out of date. Marcia walked up to the tablet of household meals, a long enamelled strip let into the wall. On this were printed the names of the family, seven in number, and blank spaces beneath for five guests. The Hopes had three indoor servants, and the law, which so wisely restricts the members of a modern household to fifteen at most, had just been passed. The breakfast record ran thus:—

Mrs. Hope.—Tea and toast.
Mr. Hope.—Coffee and broiled bacon.

Miss Hope.—Coffee and bread and butter.

Master Frank Hope.—Coffee, hot sausages and fried potatoes.

Master George Hope.—Tea, pork-pie, fried potatoes.

Master William Hope.—Tea, cold ham, muffins.

Master Henry Hope.—Oatmeal porridge, broiled bacon.

Guests.—(none.)

Marcia touched a metal button opposite to each entry, and then, taking an egg from a basket on the sideboard, placed it beneath a wing of her favourite "electric hen."

Her father had wished her to put aside this childish toy, but she clung affectionately to it, and being an only girl and much indulged, she was allowed to keep it, though in most other families it had long been relegated to things of the past.

In her present serious mood she dwelt with pleasure on the recollections of her childhood that the culinary toy brought to her mind—the thrill of delight when the pretty hen gave her first cluck—and raising her wings, exposed to view an egg in its first or lightly-boiled stage—the second cluck for those who liked their eggs well done—the third for hard-boiled.

Presently the sound of machinery was heard. A central portion of the floor so neatly fitted that the juncture was imperceptible, descended and in a few minutes rose again, a completely furnished table. This everyday experience on the stage, and which is now adapted to the very poorest houses, was then only supplied to the rich. Seven chairs on noiseless castors were propelled towards the table, and the breakfast arrangements were complete. At the same time, a door, forming part of the panelling of the room, disappeared, moving sideways into the wall. In walked Mr. and Mrs. Hope—she leaning heavily on her husband's arm—followed at intervals by their four sons, scuffling, elbowing each other, and chattering as boys will.

They were a very handsome family. Mr. Hope represented in perfection the typical Englishman of middle age, tall, erect, with bold, clear-cut features, and a physiognomy denoting a character equal to good or bad fortune.

Mrs. Hope's appearance was not equally satisfactory. She was lovely, with the ripe beauty of a woman nearing her fortieth year, but there was a hunted, distressed look in her large eyes, and a quivering of the mouth, that told of mental trouble. She

tried, but ineffectually, to eat, and at times started and looked round the table at her children with a terrified anxious glance. At such times, Mr. Hope would look at her half-lovingly, half-angrily, and in a low warning voice say, "Mary," when she would colour faintly and make an incoherent remark, or address herself again unsuccessfully to her breakfast.

Marcia was, everyone said, "her mother over again," but she was slightly taller, and though thoroughly feminine and amiable in appearance, she had at times a resolute, not to say imperious, look, which she owed to her father.

At the end of the table, opposite their mother, the four boys, fine, well-grown lads, were discussing some subject with evident heat. At last the noise became unendurable, and Mr. Hope, who had been vainly trying to fix his attention on the *Times*, at last laid it down and asked what they were talking about.

A sudden silence fell on the quartet, and Mr. Hope repeated his question in a louder and more impatient tone. Frank, the eldest, in obedience to looks, nudges and whispered exhortations from his three brothers, answered reluctantly:

- "We were talking about the last selection, Pater."
- "Aye, indeed? And what may you have to say about that? Speak out, my boy," said his father, glancing at Mrs. Hope, who turned deadly pale and looked down at her breakfast cup.
 - "We were saying it was so unjust."
 - "A regular sell."
 - " A jolly shame."
 - "The most duffing thing out," said the four boys together.
- "Upon my word," began Mr. Ho e angrily, and then checking himself—"Well, boys, it is disappointing to me to find you so ignorant of the most important of your civic and political duties, but after all, human nature is human nature, and the more complete a reform is, the less is the apparent necessity for its institution."

Mr. Hope paused, and threw himself back in his chair, putting his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat. In this oratorical attitude he continued, while Mrs. Hope sat as if turned to stone. Marcia, with a heightened colour, looked attentive. The boys, frightened and bored, sat uneasily, gulping in turn as each thought he was unnoticed by his father, at food and drink, in imminent danger of choking.

"It is incredible to you younger folks, no doubt," said Mr. Hope, "that London, now so beautiful, so clean, so healthy, so safe to traverse by day or night, was once foul, pestilential, and infested by gangs of criminals, who were only kept in some sort of order by bodies of ill-paid and over-worked police. When now in our most frequented streets you meet with, at most, twenty persons, all well-dressed, well-looking and healthy; you would, in the old times, before the present wise system of check to over-population was inaugurated, have met with as many thousands, most of whom were rushing hither and thither, striving frantically for the means of mere livelihood.

"A frightful proportion of both sexes were decrepit, deformed or diseased, and starving. To deaden the pangs of hunger these unhappy beings would resort to unwholesome spirits, only to increase their sufferings in the end.

"There are in the British Museum many pictures and engravings representing our largest and broadest thoroughfares five hundred years ago. Take the Strand, for instance, now so quiet and breezy. There was then a perpetual stream of vehicles passing up and down the road, dangerous alike to human and brute life. Omnibuses, cabs, carts, waggons, private carriages in enormous numbers, made traffic dangerous to a frightful extent. The roar and hum of so much life and motion were deafening, one might say maddening. In the City it was worse still.

"Still the population continued to increase. In vain (I am speaking of England only at present, for the sake of conciseness) we poured streams of surplus beings into our colonies. In vain we raised the standard of examination fitting men and women for paying posts in their native country. Australia filled up, and even the vast Canadian Dominion, on which we had for centuries relied for supplies of grain and meat, became inadequate for the support of its own native population. The distress consequent on the terrible and protracted struggle for bare subsistence, through all England and its dependencies became so fearful and intolerable that many remedies were proposed and resorted to by our legislature, amongst others, partitions of property, re-distribution of land, and so forth. But the best and only true one, was the death-tale, or as we euphemistically put it, the selection, by which one in a certain number of citizens is called upon to die for the good of the rest, after the decennial census is taken, and the

proportion of the human beings to the means of subsistence is ascertained. This law was passed in 2041, the population then having so enormously and mischievously increased in an inverse proportion to the supply of food, that the death-tale was fixed at the rate of one to two, now by the act 9 & 10 of our present king, chapter 19, it is fixed at one in every fifteen.

"You know, of course, the first vict—ahem!—example was John, Duke of York, fifth son of Edward IX. This act of devotion (for the Royal Family are exempted if they choose to plead their prerogative) which has for ever endeared his memory to a grateful nation, was the more memorable as he was then on the eve of marriage with his cousin, the Princess of Cyprus.

"Science was resorted to, to find out the most swift and painless mode of inflicting death. For a long time the favourite means was by applying an electric shock at the juncture of the spinal marrow with the brain, but ultimately a still more perfect means, that of——"

Here Mr. Hope was interrupted in his harangue by a sudden movement on the part of Marcia, who hastily rose and went to her mother's assistance. Mrs. Hope had fallen back in her chair, deadly pale and with half-closed eyes. Marcia knelt down by her, and clasped her hands.

"Open the window," said Mrs. Hope feebly.

Mr. Hope rose, and threw up the sash.

At a signal from their father the boys left the room discontentedly, casting loving, anxious looks at their insensible mother. Henry, the youngest boy, burst out crying as he went through the door, and was immediately set upon by his elders, who freely administered cuffs and nudges to their junior, with appellations of "young softy," "little duffer," and the like, their own eyes being suspiciously red.

CHAPTER II.

WEAKNESS AND STRENGTH. A DRIVE. REDMAYNE'S IN 3091. MRS. HOPE had been half-led, half-carried into her bed-room, and laid upon her bed. After applying the usual remedies for a fainting fit, Marcia saw her mother revive, but only to weep, and wring her hands most piteously. In vain Marcia tried to soothe her. Mrs. Hope continued to wail and moan, until

suddenly rising into a sitting posture, she looked round the room, and seeing there was no one present but Marcia, beckoned to her to come nearer.

"Marcia," said she, fixing her great earnest eyes on her daughter's face, "sometimes. I ask myself if you are a woman at all. How can you, young, pretty, and engaged to such a man as Edward, think of obeying this horrible law of selection?"

"My dear mamma," answered Marcia smiling, "the answer is very simple. I obey it because it is the law."

"A law! that takes you in the bloom of youth from father, mother, brother, friends, and the husband of your choice."

"Marcia! Sit down here, dear, and listen to me. I was a very little girl when this dreadful law reached me, and knew nothing about its real meaning till years after. How well I recollect my father one day taking me in his arms and kissing me, and bidding me good-bye—he was going on a long journey, he said. My mother stood by, looking at him fixedly, quite silent, with her face drawn and white. They went out together; I never knew where, and she returned alone. Often and often I used to cry for my father, and ask mamma when he was coming back. She tried to comfort me by saying we should go to meet him some day, that he could not come to us. And in time I forgot to ask, and my grief wore itself out."

Marcia had heard all this before, but out of deference to her mother, sat in the place assigned to her on her bed, while Mrs. Hope, with trembling fingers, fumbled in the bosom of her gown. From it she withdrew a small object, which she concealed in the hollow of her hand, and then went on with growing excitement:

"Poor darling mamma! she tried to live for me, but it was too hard. The death of my father broke her heart, and she pined away gradually.

"I was very young when I married your father, very thoughtless, and very little better than a school-girl. He was so grand, so much above me in intellect, I felt timid and almost hopeless of satisfying him. But I did my very best, and I am sure he will say I have been a good wife to him. He does, now doesn't he, Marcia dear?" And the poor nerveless creature looked wistfully and imploringly in her daughter's face.

"I am sure papa does you justice, mamma," said Marcia evasively.

Mrs. Hope went on, more cheerily.

"Then you came to me, dear, and, oh! how happy I was! You were such a dear, fat, rosy, little baby, and I could talk and tell all my silly thoughts to you, and you would laugh and crow in my face, or sometimes you would look grave and serious, and coo at me, as if you understood me. Your father would get impatient and angry at what he called my simpleton's ways. He is so grave, so wise! But I was happy enough until one day your aunt Bessie called to see me with death written in her face; the death-tale had fallen on Charles, her only child. Then the whole thing showed itself before me. I felt a horrible clutch at my heart. It has never gone. I feel it still. It will never go."

"It is most strange," the poor thing went on maundering, "I went twice, and quite mechanically to draw our vanishing-tickets. But they were all blanks, excepting once"—shuddering.

"Excepting once! Mamma," said Marcia, thinking with terror that her mother was raving.

"Yes—yes," replied Mrs. Hope hurriedly. "I must not talk of that, it was horrible—horrible. I escaped by a miracle. Your father forbade me to speak of it, I forgot—where was I? Oh! well, ever since Charles's death, I have always felt the selections might fall on any of my own children, and the birth of each successive one has been a torture and a horror to me."

"Mamma," said Marcia, taking advantage of a pause, during which Mrs. Hope lay back exhausted, "of course it is very painful to lose one's relations, but still, we must all die."

"Yes," replied her mother, "whenever our time comes, and if I saw my children sickening for death, I could spare them, I know I could, but you are all so handsome, so strong, so healthy. Marcia! a mother's heart cannot reason in your cold-blooded way."

"Well, mamma, what would you suggest?"

"I am going to tell you. Your father suspects me. He watches all my movements, and for a long time has not trusted me with any but the smallest sums. But here," showing a little case, "is something he does not know of. They are my aunt's pearls, and have been valued at two thousand pounds. My brother will make a false return of your selection and cremation, and with the money arising from the sale of these, you can escape to—"

Marcia interrupted her.

"Do not, pray, dear mamma, ever speak of this again. I can never think of evading the laws of the country in which I live, and—forgive me for saying so—in a manner equally silly and disgraceful."

"Then go—go!" cried her mother, wildly, and turning from Marcia, she buried her face in her pillows, her whole frame shaking with convulsive sobs.

Marcia stood for some time beside her mother, trying reason and persuasion by turns, but in vain. Mrs. Hope raised her head once, and exclaimed, "I have opened my whole heart to you, but you have none—none!" She hid her face again, and waved her daughter off as she leaned over her.

In great discouragement Marcia was about to leave the room, when her mother recalled her.

"You have seen my weakness," she said in a tone of wounded tenderness and dignity, "do not betray me to your father. My life is bitter enough."

Too distressed to speak, Marcia bowed her head in sign of obedience. She was deeply mortified at what she could not with all her habitual deference for her mother, but characterize as selfish weakness.

"How painful to have one's confidence in a parent shaken," said she to herself as she closed the door. "Thank Heaven I can always look up to my father."

Passing through the hall, her eye fell on the "Table of Daily Engagements" where the words appeared—

"Miss Hope, Study."

She found her father pacing gloomily up and down. As she entered he turned and said abruptly:

"Marcia. I have grave cause of displeasure with you."

"With me, papa?"

"Yes, with you, Marcia. Knowing as you must your mother's lamentable weakness of character, you should help me in every way to uphold and strengthen her. Your conduct has been the reverse of this, as you very well know. Your display of petulance and ill-temper when you drew your vanishing-ticket, was not lost on me, and it awakened in your mother the revolt against the law that is always slumbering in her mind."

"Father," said Marcia, deprecatingly, "I assure you, I was

only annoyed for the moment, thinking I should miss knowing if Frank passed his exam."

"Frank will do very well without you," said her father coldly. "The important and pressing subject is this. I am in perpetual fear of your mother being summoned and tried for incivism, and I have only just succeeded in obtaining a medical certificate that her mind has been unsettled since her attack of nervous fever after Henry's birth. Do not inflict on me the misery of seeing another member of my family suspected of inci——"

"Oh, pray don't, papa," cried Marcia, thoroughly subdued, "it is too dreadful. Don't repeat the word; I will do anything to remove the bad impression I have made on you, by a fit of passing ill-temper."

"I speak of positive events, not mere impressions," persisted Mr. Hope, moodily. "See how the spirit of dissatisfaction and insubordination spreads. You noticed the rebellious attitude and remarks of your brothers this morning. I found them still pursuing the subject instead of going to school, and Henry crying like a girl. I had to resort to stringent measures to bring him to reason."

Marcia winced. She knew the stringent measures alluded to were of the corporal kind. With all her admiration for her father, his notions of domestic discipline tried her powers of acquiescence to the utmost. The idea of her gentle, timid, little Henry being caned for crying over his mother, was after the scene of the morning too much for her.

"There, there," said Mr. Hope magnanimously, seeing the effect he had produced, "we will say no more about it."

"But, papa, there is something I hardly like to mention-"

"Tell me, my dear."

"Well, then, I am afraid Edward is not quite—quite—I have heard him say, the present law should be reformed. He says the selection should be made from the aged and diseased, not indiscriminately, and taking in the young and healthy, and—and—the beautiful."

"Raw theory—mere young man's folly," said Mr. Hope. "Besides, my child, we have to deal with the law as it is, not as Mr. Edward Vansittart would have it. Now run away, child, get on your hat, and we will have a drive, and choose your selection dress at Redmayne's."

Marcia was quickly dressed for a drive, and after looking in at her mother, who seemed to be quietly sleeping, joined Mr. Hope in his electric phaeton.

They drove together through the beautiful meadows surrounding St. Mary's le Strand and St. Clement Danes.

"Your grandfather," remarked Mr. Hope, "could recollect these beautiful churches hemmed in by tall, ugly houses, made more hideous still by enormous advertising placards. As the population of London was reduced, the houses were judiciously cleared away. There was a proposal made to clear away the churches themselves, but their beauty and picturesque situation happily saved them."

They approached St. Paul's, and at a good point of view, Mr. Hope stopped the vehicle.

"Here again," said he, "is an instance of the wisdom of our present judicature. This magnificent structure, the second—some say the first—in the world for sublimity, might, two hundred years ago, be fairly said to be lost to the public. The best view, and that but a poor one, was to be had from a street now cleared away, Watling Street, which has bequeathed its name to Watling Park. This noble cathedral was, so to speak, hemmed in on every side by warehouses. Thousands, I may say millions, of persons must have passed it daily without raising their heads to mark its beauties, and, indeed, if they had, would probably have had a crick in the neck for their pains."

"It was very foolish to build things where nobody could see them," replied Marcia absently. She had given only half attention to her father's observations. In spite of herself her mother's words, "Sometimes I ask myself if you are a woman at all," rang in her ears.

Remarking his daughter's abstraction, Mr. Hope turned back, and having taken a way round, drove into Bond Street, lately rebuilt on the new plan, which now allows more room on the ground floor, and restricts the height of dwelling-houses to two storeys.

They drew up at Redmayne's.

Mr. Hope, who was a *connoisseur* in feminine attire, asked to see various rich materials.

"This should have been your mother's task, by rights," said he, sighing, "but unhappily——"

"I beg pardon, sir," said the handsome, faultlessly-dressed gentleman behind the counter, "are you choosing the materials for this lady's selection dress, may I ask?"

Mr. Hope gave assent.

"Then perhaps the lady will step this way and look at our wax representations while you peruse the papers and magazines."

Marcia followed a young woman who appeared at a signal, and entered the "selection" show-room.

It was a large, lofty apartment, lighted from above. A splendid organ occupied one end, presided at by a famous master, who played various pieces, all of a solemn character.

Around the three other sides, against the wall, were a number of couches, on which were lying waxen figures, representing females of every age. Those in extreme youth were robed in white, the old in black or sombre colours, and those at intermediate ages in every tint. The draperies were mostly woollen fabrics, but some of silk.

The workmanship was for the most part of a common-place order, recalling the figures displayed in hair-dressers' windows. There was an attempt here and there at individual likeness of the persons represented, but in most instances it was frittered away in unmeaning prettiness.

Marcia looked at them all with indifference until she came to one, towards which the show-woman led her impressively, while the organist played with exquisite feeling, "Waft her, angels, to the skies."

"This is our masterpiece, madam, Lady Blanche Genista. We supplied her for the last selection; she is just your style."

Marcia started as if she had suddenly come upon her own reflection. The figure had evidently been modelled by a great artist, who had given to wax the expressiveness of real breathing life. The figure was that of a girl of twenty, lying on one side, asleep, with a smile on her lips, as if dreaming happily. One arm was curved under the head, the other lay along the side, the exposed hand holding a sprig of white broom.

"Just your style, madam," repeated the show-woman, "and your very image! Shall I take the order for the dress?"

It was of blue brocade flowered with silver.

Marcia started. She had been so absorbed as to have for-

gotten all save the image before her. Another customer entered. She walked reluctantly away to rejoin her father, followed by the show-woman, who carried samples of stuff. Lady Blanche's robe was of great price, but Mr. Hope was generous. The choice was made, measures taken, and in high good humour on the one side, and quiet satisfaction on the other, father and daughter returned to Guelph Square.

CHAPTER III.

A RETROSPECT.

"LOOK here, Marcia," said Mr. Hope to his daughter when, after luncheon, she was seated at needlework, "here is an account of the last decennial selection but one."

He held out a dingy copy of the Morning Post.

"I kept it," he resumed, "because it was the last occasion of the Government officials making use of a comparatively clumsy process instead of the prompt and painless one now in use."

Marcia took it with interest.

It was the *Morning Post* for the 21st June, 3071, and the article to which her father drew her attention was headed:

"IMPOSING CEREMONY AT THE WEST END.

"PROCESSION OF THE WESTMINSTER CONTINGENT OF IMMO-LANDS. STRIKING SCENES. PAINFUL INCIDENT."

And went on:—

- "At an early hour on Monday morning, the whole population of London was astir and pouring an ever-increasing stream of holiday-makers into the streets.
- "From every quarter, well-dressed, good-humoured citizens converged towards one point, the stately Chapel of Martyrs, with its *electrophorium* attached, in Victoria Street, Westminster.
- "Towards eleven o'clock, a.m., a brilliant cortège comprising every vehicle in use, from the stately equipage of the Duke of Birmingham, with the well-known white and gold liveries, to the humble hired hansom, was in motion. By previous agreement, the starting point was from Buckingham Gate, the pas being taken by the ducal party.

"Owing to the admirable arrangements of the police no accident of any kind, not even the slightest hitch, occurred to the long train of carriages as it slowly passed along Buckingham Palace Road, past Victoria Station, and finally stopped one by one at the entrance of the Martyrs' Chapel.

"With a kindly indulgence of a natural curiosity, the Immolands had all arrived in open carriages, and an excellent view of the occupants was obtained. We need not say every window, as they passed, was lined, every balcony crowded, every roof—nay, even every chimney-stack—was loaded with eager gazers.

"His Grace of Birmingham's carriage was, as we have said, the first in order, and a hum of admiration arose from the spectators as the young and lovely Duchess of Birmingham with her three charming girls alighted. She exchanged a few words with her husband, who gaily waved his hand in adieu to her and her children, as he drove off *en route*, we hear, for Paris.

"Her Grace, as well as the Ladies Eva, Clara, and Marie Snowe, was attired in white and silver, the robes being cut in the style called à *l'immolée*.

"The tall and stately figure of Sir Eustace Dyke next engaged public attention. He was accompanied by Lady Dyke, who wore a robe similar to that of her sister, the Duchess of Birmingham, with the addition of a light blue sash with floating ends.

"As this is the first contingent of Immolands that has offered itself for ten years, we will explain for the benefit of the younger portion of the public, that citizens can volunteer to accompany their 'selected' friends. By so doing, they earn for any individual they name an exemption from the next drawing of lots. The female substitutes adopt as a distinguishing badge, a blue scarf, worn as a sash. The men wear a broad blue ribbon, similar to the Order of the Garter, but coming from the right shoulder instead of from the left.

"Of substitutes of the fairer sex, we noticed several, but of the sterner only one came under our observation. He was a man considerably advanced in life, and who, being crippled by chronic rheumatism, had to be carried into the chapel.

"In the chancel of the Martyrs' Chapel, awaiting the Immolands, stood, in full ceremonial dress, the Sheriff of London, the Coroner for Westminster, and numerous other officials, amongst

whom we noticed Sir Bartimæus Robinson, M.D., and Drs. Barnby and Vyse.

"At five minutes to eleven the procession began to form. The officials walked in first, two by two. Then came the Immolands, forming two long rows, the men on the right, the women on the left hand.

"As they entered the chapel, the two lines deployed right and left, the organ, meanwhile, pealing out an inspiriting voluntary under the skilful hands of Sir Robert Skene, Mus.D. As the last chords died faintly away, every Immoland was seated, and the carved oak stalls extended in triple tiers on each side were quite full.

"The service was choral, adapted from Handel's 'Theodora,' and (a circumstance which lent a peculiar pathos to the occasion) the choir was composed entirely of Immolands. No mere words can convey the touching sweetness, combined with grandeur, of this imposing and yet simple ceremonial. At times we ourselves felt overpowered by the emotions it called forth, and at each pause, as the censers swung to and fro, sending forth their perfumed breath, ascending in blue clouds, hiding the groined roof, we could imagine the souls of the devoted citizens rising with it, borne aloft to their heavenly dwelling.

"At the close of the service (a short one), a prayer was offered up by the Bishop of Westminster, the congregation reverently kneeling, and at its termination, all rose, and leaving their stalls, formed as before into two rows.

"Again the organ poured forth a volume of magnificent music, a march composed for this memorable occasion by the gifted organist. To its grand and lofty rhythmic measure, the Immolands, male and female, the first headed by Sir Eustace Dyke, the latter by the Duchess of Birmingham, walked towards the east end of the chapel, where the doors had been thrown open.

"Gracefully and in perfect time, the two lines moved on, until all had disappeared within the *electrophorium*, followed, as they had formerly been preceded, by the sheriff, the four State physicians, and attendant officials. The two doors were then closed, the organ ceased to vibrate, and a solemn, heart-thrilling silence, terrible because of its suddenness, reigned in the immense building, where a few seconds before all had been instinct with life and melody. "The silence endured for the space of half-an-hour, when the great bell of the Martyrs' Chapel (which, we must remind our readers, is the largest in the world) began to toll.

"From the belfry of every church and chapel throughout the United Kingdom (the authorities being warned by telegraphic communication) tolled forth a repetition of the solemn message, which was also cabled to our colonies and dependencies in every part of the world.

"Grand thought! that the mighty heart of our vast dominion was at that hour thrilled to its inmost core by admiring sympathy with six hundred devoted souls, victims of a heroism as great as that which to this day ennobles the plain of Marathon. At the sound of the death-bell every man uncovered his head, the strongest and most stoical amongst us felt a strange constriction of the throat, and women and girls burst into irrepressible weeping. Several of the sparse number left in the chapel fainted, and immediately received the professional attentions of the doctor and his assistants, who always attend at the Martyrs' Chapel in readiness for these frequent contingencies.

"All being now over, the congregation slowly dispersed, and the chapel was empty.

"By the kindness of the authorities a few members of the press were admitted into the *electrophorium* when the doors were flung open to admit the coroner and his secretary. The first hall we visited was that allotted to the Immolands of the sterner sex. All were leaning back in their respective high-backed seats, as if in profound slumber.

"The coroner walked from one to the other, making as he did so a formal notification of the deaths by electricity of each.

"He then passed into the female department. The eye instinctively sought for the form of the Duchess of Birmingham, who with her three lovely daughters formed a group of the most pathetic beauty. Her eldest daughter had clasped her mother round the neck, and drawn her to herself, as if whispering some childish confidence. The two younger were lying at her feet, their heads in her lap, and clinging to each other.

"We observed the great sculptor, Sir Edgar Forbes, making a sketch of this beautiful group. We understand that his Grace of Birmingham has commissioned Sir Edgar to immortalise in marble the memories of his beloved wife and daughters, united in death.

"As we passed on, pausing before other beautiful and affecting figures, a painful and, in the annals of the present reign, an unprecedented incident occurred.

"A slight moan proceeded from one of the death-like figures of the Immolands.

"Under the circumstances, it was an occurrence calculated to shake the stoutest nerves. The cry was given by a young girl, whose sumptuous dress and refined appearance denoted her to be a person of consequence. She opened her eyes, trembled violently, and looked about her with a terrified, bewildered expression.

"A hurried consultation between the officials took place, as to whether a second shock should not in common humanity be administered. The sheriff, however, having explained that his powers did not extend beyond the application of one, the poor, half-moribund young lady was placed in the care of one of the matrons whose duty it is to watch the corpses of the Immolands until they are removed to the State Crematorium.

"An official present undertook to make searching enquiries as to the name and residence of the hapless sufferer, and to restore her to her friends as soon as possible.

"We also earnestly trust that an enquiry may be speedily made by the Government into the cause of this scandalous miscarriage of justice and breach of all public decorum.

"We have heard, though the remark may be premature, that the young lady in question is nearly allied in blood with one of the highest officials present, and that the failure was not unintentional.

"The public may trust in us. We will keep our eyes open in its interest, and guard its sacred rights."

"How very interesting," said Marcia, as she laid the paper down.

"I wonder who the young girl was who escaped so narrowly. Did she recover?"

Mr. Hope made no answer.

Marcia reflected. Her mother's broken sentences recurred to her.

"That girl was mamma herself," thought she.

On recurring to the subject, however, her father showed so much irritation that she wisely forbore further question.

CHAPTER IV.

AN EVENING "EN FAMILLE." THE VANISHING TICKET.

That evening Marcia had a trying task before her. Mrs. Hope still kept her room. Mr. Hope was gloomy and silent. The boys missed their mother, and had a resentful recollection of the morning's lecture and its sequel. Marcia suggested different games, which they tried in turns, and quarrelled over. They gave them up, and rebellious, fretful and noisy, preferred sitting together, cuffing and teasing each other.

To her father, Marcia proposed a game of chess. The challenge was accepted, and they were soon deep in the game.

The room in which they were sitting, and in which it was their custom to assemble when alone of an evening, had been planned and designed by Mr. Hope himself. It was of dark oak, elaborately carved, of octagon shape and lighted from above only by a dome-shaped double skylight. The outer skylight was of colourless glass, the inner of intense blue. latter was in eight half-clove-shaped compartments arranged like venetian blinds, which could at will be raised or lowered, and when lowered, fell together into a groove concealed within the cornice. If the day were dull or cloudy all were lowered so as to admit the greatest amount of light possible from the sky. If the light were too strong, one or more were raised according to the place of the sun. At night a flood of electric light was poured in, between the double roof, and a singular effect was obtained by the blue glass being spangled with tiny stars, white, red and yellow.

In the centre of each wall was a panel, in which were framed admirable copies of the finest portraits in the world. Monna Lisa and "la belle ferronière," with their inscrutable faces, the sunny Raffaelle and del Sarto, the sad Mantegna, and the arch lady in the "Chapeau de paille" filled six of these panels, the remaining two were destined to receive the portraits of Mrs. and Miss Hope, but Mr. Hope had not been able hitherto to satisfy himself in the choice of an artist. Round each central panel, like satellites round a planet, were smaller panels containing rare bits of colour or design. The carving, representing groups

of fruit, flowers, and "amorini" had been designed expressly to form a setting for these.

The room was not a favourite one with the Hope family. After all his expenditure of money and thought, Mr. Hope like many others found his family were the last to appreciate what he fondly expected to be hailed with acclamation. They all complained of it in different wording. The boys told their sister, "those gloomy old 'blokes' seemed to follow them about all over the shop with their eyes, which made a fellow feel creepy, you know," an expression of opinion which Marcia good-naturedly kept to herself.

The game had proceeded for half-an-hour.

"Check to your queen, Marcia," said her father.

At this moment, a portion of the carved wall moved aside, and the telephonic announcement "Mr. Vansittart" was followed by the entrance of a tall, dark young man, about eight-and-twenty.

A shout of delight from the boys, and a rush at the new-comer by the three younger ones, showed the favour with which Edward Vansittart was regarded by them. Frank, who considered himself past the age of demonstration, contented himself by looking on and grinning a welcome.

- "I say, Edward, when are you going to take us to the play?"
- "There's a cricket-match to come off to-morrow between our fellows and the Westminster lot."
- "Hang your plays and cricket, you come and see me try my new pony."
- "Let me speak to your father and sister, boys," said Edward, laughing, and then, his assailants pressing him on all sides, and clinging to him, he caught up George and William, and put them one on each side of the mantel-piece, beside the clock, and then swung Henry on to the book-case.

Having thus disposed of them, shouting and laughing, he advanced towards Marcia and Mr. Hope, with both of whom he quietly shook hands.

- "Do you see the danger my poor queen is in?" said Marcia. Edward looked gravely and consideringly at the board.
- "Advance your knight," said he, indicating the move, "or stay, Marcia, I'll finish your game, if Mr. Hope will have me."
- "Do so, and I will go and look at mamma, she is not well this evening."

While she was speaking, the panel again moved aside, and Mrs. Hope stood there, her figure relieved against a dark background.

Familiar as Edward was with her appearance, he was startled by her radiant beauty, which struck him this evening as if he had seen it for the first time. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes shone with a feverish light. She was draped in a loose crimson velvet gown, and that and the scarf of heavy black lace folded about her head and shoulders, threw out the brilliant red and white of her complexion.

"I am sorry to hear you have been ill," said the young man, advancing towards her.

"I am much better now, Edward," was the reply, given in a faltering voice; "don't let me disturb you," waving her hand towards the table at which Mr. Hope was seated.

Edward first went to release his young prisoners with the whispered caution: "Be quiet, boys, your mother is not well," and then with a strong effort, concentrated his attention on his game.

But throughout, Edward was haunted by a feeling that Mrs. Hope was looking at him. He could not forbear glancing round at her.

She was seated on a sofa opposite to the table, with her four boys grouped about her, Henry with his curly head on her lap, and Marcia standing behind her. Her great deer-like eyes sought Edward's with a yearning, piteous gaze, that smote him with intense compassion. He turned away hastily.

The game was finished. Marcia's queen had been extricated from her perilous position, and Mr. Hope was after a sharp struggle defeated. He was proud of his skill as a chess-player, and resented Edward's victory accordingly.

He sat for some seconds in moody silence, then in a rasping voice remarked:

"Oh, by the way, Vansittart, Marcia drew her vanishing ticket, last week."

"So I heard," replied Edward carelessly, "and by an odd coincidence, I have drawn mine also. It is singular, being in different parishes. Here it is."

He drew it from his waistcoat pocket. It was a white card, with 15 on one side, and the words: "Pro salute patriæ suum caput vovit"* on the other.

^{*} C cero, De Finibus.

It was handed round the room and compared with Marcia's, with which it corresponded in every respect.

"There is another singular coincidence in the matter, Mrs. Hope," said Edward. "Mr. Clifden and Lady Barbara have drawn their vanishing tickets also, and not wishing to leave their children alone in the world, are going to take them in their yacht *Kriemhild*, and drown themselves in a family party. They want Marcia and me to join them."

"How about the crew?" asked Mr. Hope.

"Oh, they are all selected too, and know nothing about boats or sailing. I believe I am the only one of the crew that knows the bow from the stern. The servants, too, together with Miss Bates the governess, and a clergyman, a cousin of Mr. Clifden's, have likewise drawn their vanishing tickets——"

" And the yacht?"

"Has been built on the model chosen by the Admiralty for speed and safety. They gave seventy thousand for it."

"Capital!" exclaimed Mr. Hope, "it is therefore safe to sink."

"Yes, or blow up, or both. There is a great advantage, you know, in our going in the *Kriemhild*. We shall escape a lot of wearisome, red-tape nonsense by it. As we go on board, an officer examines our vanishing tickets, reports us as lost at sea, and there's an end to all formalities."

Mr. Hope, a staunch supporter of the Government, felt inclined to take up and resent the expression "red-tape nonsense," but he was not insensible to the prestige that would attend Marcia's immolation in the company of such distinguished individuals. He listened in silence therefore, while Edward went on, this time addressing himself to Mrs. Hope.

"I believe I shall have a scolding from Lady Barbara. This is quite unofficial of course. She will call on you herself, and request the honour and pleasure and so forth. I ought not to have anticipated her."

"Marcia ordered her 'selection' dress to-day," said Mrs. Hope with an evident effort. "Show Edward the pattern, dear."

Marcia took from her work-drawer a square of the brocade that had formed Lady Blanche Genista's robe, and with sweet, innocent coquetry, laid it against her soft cheek. It was the very tint to suit her alabaster lamp-like colouring, that rarest of complexions that accompanies the true auburn hair, with purple shades.

Edward looked up at her for one moment, and again the sight of marvellous loveliness affected him with a subtle pain. All this wealth of beauty, charm and ineffable sweetness! What was to become of it?

The boys had been dismissed to bed, and Edward rose to take his leave.

"You will have a pleasant walk," said Mr. Hope, pushing aside a shutter (which like the door slid into a groove in the wall) and letting in a flood of moonlight. The moon was at full, and shone down on the meadows, the river, and on the pleasure-craft anchored for the night. Ever and anon, however, a pretty sailing boat shot past, her sails and spars tricked with silver.

While Mr. Hope was looking out at the river, Edward went up to Mrs. Hope, and bade her good-night.

The poor lady looked up in his face, with the same expression of agonised entreaty that had before moved him so much. He took her feverish hand in his, and for a moment she leant her throbbing head on his shoulder:

"Oh, Edward," she whispered imploringly.

The young man, touched to his very heart, passed his disengaged arm round her, and held her to him.

"Trust me," he said. In another moment he was gone.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

DOUBTS. A LOVERS' QUARREL.

A MONTH had passed since the events recorded in our last.

The Kriemhild was well on her way—but whither?

Lady Barbara Clifden stood on the deck, a pretty little woman, somewhat worn and faded for her seven-and-twenty years.

Marcia and Edward, tall, stately and handsome, were at her side.

Mr. Clifden, as became the owner of a yacht, was a vile sailor, and had been prostrate with sea-sickness, ever since the Kriemhild had left Torquay.

The Rev. Charles Dobbs, a third guest, was also helpless from the same cause.

Miss Bates the governess, and the two nurses had given up from the moment of the *Kriemhild* leaving shore.

The young Clifdens, three in number, were lying about on rugs in various languid attitudes.

"Dear me," said Lady Barbara, "it is time to give Miss Bates her broth, and see how Fanny and Sarah are. Excuse me, Marcia," and the kind little lady hurried away.

Marcia and Edward were thus left to take care of the children. The rest of the crew were at chess or ship-billiards. As the *Kriem-hild* had from the first proved utterly unmanageable, they very properly forbore to trouble themselves about navigation, and as they said, "took it easy."

"Edward," said Marcia, having taken the youngest child on her lap, "I have something important to say to you. I am not at all satisfied with the way things are going on."

"No?" said the young man, uneasily, adjusting or pretending to adjust the sight of a day-glass.

"No, indeed! Here we are in mid-ocean, and I see no sign of any attempt being made to realise the object of our voyage."

"The object? Are you certain, Marcia, that you know what it is?"

"Quite certain. We came here to drown ourselves, or be drowned, in obedience to the law of selection."

"Oh, well, you know, we have had a long spell of fine weather up to now. It can't last much longer, and then——"

Here Bobby Clifden began to howl, greatly to Edward's relief, though he was fond of children.

That night Marcia lay awake revolving many thoughts in her mind. She had noticed that the *Kriemhild* was going but half-speed, and there was a look of anxiety on the faces of all the crew, intensified on those of Lady Barbara and Edward very unlike their jovial and somewhat reckless unconcern.

Suddenly the Kriemhild brought to, and she heard hurried footsteps over her head. Then the yacht was hailed in a strange voice.

After an interval she moved on. Marcia pondered. She had not heard of anyone being expected on board.

The next morning their breakfast party was increased by a

keen, intelligent-looking man, whom she had once met in her father's house, "the Edison of the thirtieth century," as he was called, a noted inventor.

It was clear to her that this was the mysterious personage who had boarded the *Kriemhild* the night before, but no allusion to the incident or to the cause of his arrival was made by any of the party.

This attempt, as Marcia deemed it, at mystification, only added to her growing irritation with Edward Vansittart and the Clifdons.

In the course of the day, she passed them all in carnest conversation. They were laughing, and she caught the words, "utterly unseaworthy," and "Davy Jones's locker in a few days."

At Brest, the *Kriemhild* put in for a week, while to Marcia's intense indignation she underwent certain alterations. Here the modern Edison took leave of them.

Marcia could endure it no longer. At the first opportunity she spoke to Edward of her suspicions, and openly taxed him with breach of faith towards her and her father.

"You cannot deny it," she said; "you have had Professor Newton here to make the *Kriemhild* safe, when it was perfectly understood between us, that she must go to pieces at the first contrary wind."

"I have no intention of denying it, Marcia, and have only been awaiting a favourable opportunity of declaring it, and at the same time of telling you another fact—that it was by my suggestion that you were invited by Lady Barbara to make this trip to avoid the approaching selection."

"And you call yourself an honourable man," cried the angry girl, "and you have by your own admission, been for more than a month, not only telling, but acting a series of untruths."

"This I admit also. But although I am no casuist, Marcia, I believe there are few men calling themselves honourable or otherwise, who would hesitate to tell or act any number of—well, call them lies, to save the life of an utter stranger, to say nothing of the being dearest to him on earth."

There was something in Edward's voice as he made this, for him, unusually sentimental speech, that touched Marcia in spite of herself. She was silent, and he, with a man's want of tact, at once proceeded to spoil the effect of what he had just said; he went on:

"Besides, I had to choose between deceiving you and your father, or rather allowing you to deceive yourselves, or letting Mrs. Hope break her heart. I gave her my word, to save her only daughter at all hazards, if possible."

"Oh, my mother," said Marcia with the slightest possible inflection of scorn in her voice. "I might have guessed her influence was at work."

"Marcia!" said Edward reproachfully, "I don't like to hear you speak so of Mrs. Hope. She is an angel."

"I beg your pardon, but I do not want you to teach me how to speak of my mother. Do not think to evade the subject by talking to me as if I were a child."

She took a few steps and then returned, and spoke with increased anger.

"You and Barbara are most unjust, most unreasonable. Your fondness for mamma seems to blind you and swallow up every other feeling. You said to me once, my father might, had he chosen, been my substitute."

"I did, certainly, and do so still."

"And you don't see the reflection on mamma? Always supposing that parents with four sons to place out in the world, have the right to throw away their lives."

Here a smile on Edward's face disconcerted her, and she added hurriedly:

"Unless the law requires it of them. But it was open, you will admit, to mamma to pursue the same course, and to sacrifice herself for me, if she chose to do so."

"Excuse me," said Edward eagerly and somewhat too triumphantly, "it was not. It is expressly provided by the Act that no one should pass through the ordeal of 'selection' twice. Your mother has been through it once. In the agony of her heart, she proposed substituting herself for you in the approaching immolation, but she was told that she is what is called exempt and legally dead. Have you never observed that Mrs. Hope never signs anything, not even a receipt for the smallest sums?"

Marcia made no reply to this. She had observed the circumstance, but had formed her own theory to account for it, namely

that her mother was weak and incapable of transacting business. After a pause, she resumed:

"Edward, be pleased to tell me one thing. Did you not, when I accepted Barbara's invitation, assure me that your highest aspiration was to die with me? Were not those your very words?"

"Certainly, but I made this mental reservation, that we might first live many happy years together."

"That shall never be. Our engagement is at an end. Here!" and she held out her engagement ring to him. It was an antique ring, of Dutch workmanship, and of great value.

Edward took it, kissed it, warm as it was from contact with the lovely little hand, and held it out to her with a smile.

"Never," said she, resolutely, "will I marry a man not only guilty himself of incivism, but who would make me so."

"Don't be childish, dear girl. Incivism is nonsense, sheer nonsense in our case. I never drew a vanishing ticket at all. The one you saw was drawn by a friend of mine, who was only too glad to pass it on to me."

"But mine, at least, was genuine."

"When you became my promised wife, you parted with the right of disposing of yourself. Come, Marcia, take back the ring."

She took it.

"These are mere quibbles," said she, throwing it on the deck.

Edward stooped, picked it up, bowed, and put it in his waist-coat pocket.

Marcia waited awhile, but her lover resumed his observation of the horizon. Perhaps she was in hopes he would come to her feet, and implore a reconciliation. But he made no sign, and she went to seek Lady Barbara.

Edward was still looking out, and observing some birds making for the *Kriemhild*, when he felt a slight touch on his arm. He turned hopefully round, the thought flashed across him—it might be Marcia. But no—there stood Lady Barbara, looking heated and anxious.

"Edward! So you and Marcia have been quarrelling?" He told her briefly what had occurred.

"I don't like her giving back the ring. She is not the sort of girl for bravado. Edward, you have blundered most wofully.

You should have persuaded her to marry you before she found us out."

"Dear Lady Barbara, excuse me. There is a slight awkwardness in proposing immediate marriage to a woman, who has just signified her preference of drowning to that condition."

"Oh, well, if you couldn't manage her, I don't know who could. You have missed your opportunity, that is clear, and we shall have a most uncomfortable time of it."

Lady Barbara might well be excused for being cross and unreasonable. Marcia had confronted her, and in pretty set terms, had charged her with treachery to herself, and a deliberate breach of the law of selection.

"Upon my word," Lady Barbara had retorted half angrily, half laughingly, "you are a model of gratitude. Here we have all been looking forward to a wedding on board. For your sake and Edward's we invited Charley Dobbs to come with us, though he is the very heaviest creature one could have on board. To look at him is enough to make one die of ennui. And allow me to say," continued the little lady, waxing angry as Marcia looked scornful, "you ought to think yourself a fortunate woman to have no worse prospect than a marriage with my cousin Edward."

"And the law! How do you defend your breach of that?"

"Oh, the law! That may take care of itself," said Lady Barbara, yawning or affecting to yawn. "I neither made it, nor was consulted about it."

"You could say just the same of the laws against murder and theft. Do you therefore consider yourself entitled to rob and kill people?"

"Oh, dear, dear, for pity's sake don't chop logic with me," putting her hands to her ears, "keep it for your husband."

From this day forward, Marcia and Edward conducted themselves towards each other like two strangers brought together for the first time. Towards the rest of the company, with the exception of the children, Miss Hope maintained a stately reserve. There was something excessively chilling and depressing in the presence of this handsome silent young woman, who appeared not to take the slightest interest in the course of outward events, and who by her coldness and indifference seemed to protest against any attempt at cheerfulness on the part of others

- "I wish we had not interfered and brought Marcia with us, Robert," said Lady Barbara to her husband, after a week's experience of that young lady's altered demeanour. "When she is in the sulks, that girl is absolutely intolerable."
 - "Awfully good-looking though," remarked Mr. Clifden.
- "Pshaw! that's all you men ever think of. If a woman's only pretty, she can do just what she likes with you."
- "Very true," said her husband, looking meaningly into the charming face, to which sea-breezes and regular hours were bringing back its girlish bloom.
- "You ridiculous old thing," was the reply given not very angrily, and with a blush and a smile.

CHAPTER II.

INVALIDS AND NURSES.

A WEEK followed, during which a succession of storms prevailed, and Marcia rose somewhat in her hostess's opinion.

Of the women they were the only two capable of exertion. The children suffered again frightfully with sea-sickness, and Miss Bates and the nurses with terror.

Marcia took charge of all the sufferers, attended on them, nursed the children, who would take nothing but from her hand, and replaced Lady Barbara's maid, who was useless.

- "Really, Marcia, you are rather inconsistent," said Lady Barbara to her one day, kindly. "According to your theory you should leave us all to our fate."
- "I never said life while it lasted was not to be made as happy and pleasant as possible," was the answer.
- "Ungracious, repellent girl," thought Lady Barbara; "you shall go your own way for me."

The bad weather continued, and the discomfort was indescribable.

According to Edward, the *Kriemhild* was in no danger, though she rolled and pitched incessantly, a good sign, he said.

One day a shock and concussion was felt by all on board. All the women excepting Marcia screamed, and clung together, thinking their last hour was come.

Miss Hope climbed, with difficulty, on deck, where the men were holding on as well as they might to ropes and bulwarks.

"What has happened?" said she to the first person she saw.

It was Edward. He turned delighted; it was the first occasion of her speaking naturally to him since their quarrel.

"We have carried away our propeller, that is all; there is no real harm done. We must sail now."

"Oh!" said Marcia in high disdain, and returned to the cabin to report matters.

Lady Barbara was in great anxiety about Tottie, her only girl. She was now suffering from a kind of low fever, and took no nourishment but a little milk and water. At last she refused even this.

"If this lasts she must die," said her mother, looking at the little wasted thing, lying white and helpless in Marcia's arms.

Mr. Clifden, at a message from Lady Barbara, came into the state-room. He bent in silence over the dying child, his favourite, unable to find a word of comfort for his weeping wife.

He went in search of Mr. Dobbs, whom he found in a collapsed condition. Edward Vansittart, he recollected, had taken a medical degree, and with him Mr. Clifden returned.

Edward brought with him, so Lady Barbara thought, an atmosphere of cheerfulness. At sight of his bronzed face, and sound of his hearty voice, a ray of unreasoning hope seemed to enter her heart.

He knelt down to get a better look at the child, took the little feverish hand, and listened to the feeble beating of the heart.

"She is sinking from want of nourishment, and that she will not take here. At the first gleam of fine weather we must take her on deck."

"Then there is hope?" said the mother breathlessly.

"Of course there is. Only at her age she cannot be induced to take food for the sake of preserving life as we should. When she breathes the fresh air, natural appetite will return. Directly the wind goes down a bit I will come for her. There is already a sign of change."

"God bless you, Edward!" said Lady Barbara, seizing his hand and kissing it, leaving her warm tears on it.

The young man scarcely seemed to notice her impulsive action, which at any other time would have been somewhat embarrassing to a man of his concentrated undemonstrative nature.

He was looking fixedly and earnestly into Marcia's face. She

was, in his eyes, more beautiful than ever, with her brilliant colouring somewhat subdued, and on her face a touching look of anxiety and sympathy that lent to her almost too statuesque beauty a charm it sometimes seemed to lack—the charm of expression. But not by so much as a flicker of the eye-lid did she seem to notice his presence. He observed that her whole frame was quivering, but he thought with the tremor of fatigue, not of emotion.

"If I could but get this strange couple to speak," said the ever good-natured Lady Barbara to herself. "What an opportunity!" Then, aloud:

"Poor dear Marcia, Edward, she must be quite exhausted; she has held Tottie like that for hours. If she moves in the slightest, the poor little thing moans, the only sign of life she gives. Isn't it so, Marcia?"

In vain! This singular pair, so near, so dear, and yet so far apart, separated by pride and obstinacy, could not be induced to exchange a word, and the golden opportunity was lost.

As he left the state-room, Edward said a few words in a low voice to Lady Barbara, who went to a table where refreshments were laid.

"Marcia, dear," she exclaimed, "I have neglected you shamefully. You must be faint, Edward says." She poured some wine into a glass, steeped a biscuit in it and fed Marcia, crying the while as if her heart would break.

The wind, which had been gradually going down, had now almost ceased. The sun had risen, the air was bright and fresh. When Edward came to the state-room door, he knocked, and at a word of permission given in Marcia's voice, looked in. Lady Barbara was lying back asleep, the sleep of exhaustion. Marcia sat just as he had left her, and Tottie lay unchanged in her arms.

"Give me the child," he whispered.

She wrapped it carefully in a fur cloak, and with some difficulty, for the sea was still heaving with the after-roll, he made his way up the companion-ladder. He carried Tottie to the poop to give her the full benefit of the morning breeze. Its effect on the child after the stifling air of the cabin was quickly visible. She opened her large sunken eyes, and smiled at her father, who, haggard and with a beard of ten days' growth, was now standing over

her, accompanied by a very dejected-looking mortal, Mr. Clifden's French cook, who of all the scratch crew looked and felt most out of place on board the *Kriemhild*.

"Try her with the broth now," said Edward. Mr. Clifden took a cup and spoon from François, and poured a few drops into the child's mouth. Had anyone unconcerned been looking on it would have been a comic sight to see the great, gaunt, unshorn man so awkwardly feeding the tiny mite of humanity. Tottie sucked down the broth, smiled and motioned with her little hand for more.

"All right, little woman," said Edward, "you'll do now; tell the dadda so."

"Me do now," said Tottie, with perfect gravity.

CHAPTER III.

LAND HO! AN AFTER DINNER SPEECH. MARCIA GIVES TROUBLE. AN EXTRACT FROM "THE TIMES."

STORMS are quickly forgotten at sea. The Kriemhild soon resumed her cheerful aspect. The glass promised a continuance of fine weather. The day was perfect, the waves had subsided, and the cry "Land in sight!" made every heart bound. To the unpractised eye it was merely a purple streak on the horizon, but the experienced knew it for an island of great extent.

"What is it called?" asked Lady Barbara.

Edward told her. It had been, he explained, the seat of a Spanish settlement, which had in the eighteenth century been destroyed by a volcanic eruption, and its vegetation to a great extent blasted by noxious vapours.

" Are there any savages there?"

"Savages in the North Atlantic at this time of day! There is nothing there worse than land-crabs, and horrible brutes they are," said Mr. Clifden laughing.

"I notice," said Lady Barbara, "that the sea is quite a different colour here to what it was. It has changed from a deep sapphire blue to a brilliant green."

"That shows the presence of coral rocks. There is a sort of coralline pier running into the sea, about two miles long, and the only place where we can land."

"I wish you would not," said Lady Barbara uneasily, "do wait until we reach——"

Here she broke off, seeing Marcia at her side who, however, took no notice and with her usual air of indifference to all about her, passed on in silence.

For the first time for ten days the ladies took their dinner in the saloon. By tacit consent, every one, with the exception of Marcia, was prepared to treat it as a gala occasion. Lady Barbara at her husband's request, who was, he said, tired of seeing her look dowdy, dressed herself with unusual care, in a wonderful gown of white silk tulle. Her arms were bare, and from the shoulders floated long and wide open sleeves trimmed with a border of white peacock's feathers. The trimming was continued on the bodice and long flowing skirt. The dress exactly suited her delicate mignonne beauty, and gave to her the air of a fairy queen. "Pretty Mamma," cried her children in chorus, and Tottie clapped her hands.

Marcia, as if to rebuke her hostess's frivolity, had donned a sombre dress of severe cut without any ornaments, and only relieved by some yellow lace. She had brushed out her curls, and coiled her hair in a knot at the back of her head. But she could not do away with its rich rippling waves, and the colour of her gown, the peculiar brown called *gorge de faisan*, harmonized with it.

"Careless of beauty, she is beauty's self," murmured Lady Barbara to Edward as she entered the saloon.

He gave one sharp, comprehensive glance, and then looked studiously away.

The hostess had been much puzzled what to do with her two sulky lovers.

She having Mr. Dobbs on her right, Edward on her left, and Mr. Clifden with Miss Bates on his left and Marcia on his right hand, would of course bring the two "irreconcilables" together.

"To have those two glooming side by side without speaking a word is really too much for my poor nerves," said she.

A bright thought struck her, she would have Bertie in to dinner, under the pretence of giving him a treat, and "sandwich" him in between her two "dead-weights," as she called them.

"Who knows," thought she, "but the child may do what none

of us can? They both spoil him so outrageously. Cossetting and petting him one on each side, may bring the two together," and the kindly soul brightened at the idea.

The dinner was successful. The bill of fare, though (with the exception of a dish of fried flying fish) composed of tinned soup, fish and meat, was pronounced "equal to anything they had eaten on land."

All went on well until dessert was placed on the table, and Mr. Clifden's valet, who officiated as butler and his two assistants, withdrew. Mr. Dobbs who, though an excellent young man, was not remarkable for tact, now rose, and begged to propose the health of their interesting little invalid, Miss Henrietta Clifden, who he was happy to learn was progressing as favourably as even her devoted parents, their excellent host and hostess could wish.

After the health was drunk Mr. Clifden was of course compelled to respond. He was as bad as a speaker, as he was good as a man, and perfectly aware of his defects.

In great nervous trepidation he replied:

"He was a man of few words, perhaps of few ideas." ("No! No!" from Mr. Dobbs). "He would not occupy more than a few seconds in saying a very few words in reply to his good friend and old companion.

"Within the last few days they had passed through not a few troubles which but for the few and tried friends he saw around him, might have become great disasters.

"His little daughter's days had been few, but he trusted not altogether evil ('Hear! hear!' from Mr. Dobbs). Not a few more would have to pass over her head, before she could fully understand the nature of her many obligations. It would be one of his and his wife's many, many duties to teach them to her. Chief among them would be life-long gratitude and affection to two dear young friends present, to whose care, skill and tenderness (under Providence) she owed her little life.

"He begged to propose the health of Miss Hope and Mr. Vansittart jointly, and," with a quiver in his voice, "may God bless them both!"

Lady Barbara choked in her glass. "Oh dear," thought she, "the dear blundering stupid old darling, to put them together like that. There's Marcia looking like a poker in summer-time,

and Edward with his head sunk on his chest. I can't stand this. I must get them out of it somehow."

She rose abruptly, and signalling Marcia and Miss Bates, swept out of the saloon.

How Edward extricated himself from his dilemma she never knew, for subsequent events banished the remembrance of this little episode from the mind of every one present.

That night the moon was shining with the searching brilliance peculiar to that latitude. A tall female figure in an ulster and hood might by its light have been seen gliding into the deserted saloon. It was Marcia. She went at once to a corner of the room, where from behind the cushion, she withdrew an empty champagne bottle. She had with her a box of matches and a taper, and writing materials. She sat down, wrote a few words on a slip of paper, inserted it into the bottle, and then, carefully corking it, returned to her cabin, and afterwards went on deck.

A few hours after, those on board the *Kriemhild* were startled by a peculiar grating noise followed by a shock. Edward had left a man named Hallett to take the middle watch, and had turned in, fairly tired out after the fatigue and excitement of the last ten days. It was hard work for him scrambling on deck, the collision or whatever was the nature of the accident having caused the yacht to carcen over.

"Haven't we struck, sir?" said one of the bewildered scratch crew to him.

"I am going to see," said Edward.

The moon had now gone down, and even to Edward's piercing sight, it was impossible to see through the intense darkness uncommon in that region even at midnight, and which was caused by a gathering of thunderous clouds, the remains of the late storm.

By his directions port-fires were burnt, which cast a shimmering light on near objects and on the sea adjacent. Each moment the *Kriemhild* heeled over more and more.

Mr. Clifden now appeared on deck, and took the lead.

"Lower the quarter-boats!" shouted he. "Get the women and children together, Edward, she's settling."

The boats were lowered in silence and perfect order. Such stores as could be got at were thrown into them, and Edward

and the clergyman, who had assisted him to assemble and marshal the frightened women, began to help them in.

"But where's Marcia?" cried Edward.

"Is she not here?" said Lady Barbara, who had Tottie in her arms.

A hurried discussion followed. No one had seen Miss Hope since twelve o'clock, when all had turned into their respective cabins.

The port fires had burnt out, but the clouds were clearing off and the day began to break.

Edward, with a dreadful sickening of the heart, but feeling all the necessity for coolness, scrambled along the deck, and steadying himself as best he could by laying hold of the bulwarks, caught sight of Marcia, standing close to the deserted wheel, which swung to and fro. She had thrown off her ulster, and was dressed in the fatal "selection robe."

"Come Marcia," said Edward as quietly and coolly as he could, "there is no time to lose; let me put you into the boat."

"I remain here," said Marcia with equal coolness. "I shall sink with the *Kriemhild*, in obedience to the law of selection, which you persist in defying."

"I must then save you, in spite of yourself," said the young man, seizing her in his strong arms.

To his relief and delight the girl appeared to yield without a struggle. But with a sudden and supreme effort she wrenched herself free from his grasp, sprang over the bulwarks, and the sea closed over her.

* * * * * * *

Extract from the Times, 13th September, 3091.

"The British Consul at Valparaiso has telegraphed the information that a bottle has been picked up on the coast of San Felipe. It contained a half-sheet of note-paper with these words written in a firm female handwriting.

"'On board the Kriemhild lat. long. (undecipherable) 3.30 a.m.

"'Have just struck on rock. All on board must perish. Pro salute patriæ suum caput vovit.—M. H.'"

CHAPTER IV.

CONCLUSION.

TO MISS HELMSLEY, WOLVERTON LODGE, NEAR LEEDS.

"MY DEAR CHRISSIE,

"You are, no doubt, thinking of us all at the bottom of the sea, with queer 'sea-beasts' poking their cold noses at us, wondering what manner of creatures we might be.

"Nothing could be farther from the reality. We are safe—on dry land, in high health and spirits, on an island situated—I dare not tell you where, lest the irrepressible Mr. Hope should send a commission out after us.

"The friendly captain of a certain boat, the Albert, that put in here for repairs, has consented to take this to England for me, and to keep our secret. Time presses; I do not know how ever I am to get in all I have to tell you; I never was a good hand at letter-writing. But after all, the thing is, to let that dear, sweet Mrs. Hope know we have kept our promise to her faithfully, and that Marcia is safe and well. Good gracious! when I think of that incomprehensible girl—how splendidly she behaved to poor, dear little Tottie, when she was all but dying, and then how coolly she plotted the destruction of our whole company, I can scarcely sit still and write my account. But it must be done, ill or well.

"So much you already know. Marcia, Hope, Robert and I all three drew our vanishing tickets at the same time. But this you did not know, for, of course, we had to keep it a profound secret, that Edward Vansittart came to us, almost out of his mind, imploring us to save Marcia, ourselves, and himself. Robert, good, easy man! takes everything just as it comes. It had never occurred to him to dispute the justice of the law of selection, under which he had grown up. But Edward so worked on him with his eloquence and earnestness, that 'he became an eager conspirator in the newly-hatched plot.

"Edward Vansittart is by his father's side of Dutch extraction, though no one, to look at him, would think it. He inherited, besides his mother's fortune, an island in the Antilles. There his ancestors, some hundreds of years ago, lived magnificently, until there happened a succession of failures in the orange crop. The great distilleries for the making of curaçoa were given up, and left to fall into ruins, and the Vansittarts ultimately came to England.

"But Edward had always cherished the idea of a return to his ancestral home. His grandfather never tired of telling him stories about his beautiful and beloved island, and the quaint old red-brick, stone-faced mansion, in which the Vansittarts had once held almost regal state. He had a fine old Dutch picture representing it before its decay. It was most wonderfully pretty and droll, like a bit of old Amsterdam taken up and set down in the tropics.

"His plan, then, was to get a forged vanishing ticket for himself, with which to delude Mr. Hope, and induce Marcia to accompany us, with the understanding that we were all like good citizens to drown ourselves within the prescribed limit of six months appointed by the law. The *Kriemhild* was so built that there was an almost certainty of her breaking up on the occasion of the first gale we should encounter.

"From the very first I had my doubts of the feasibility of the scheme. Marcia had been so trained by her pompous egotist of a father that she seemed to have lost all natural feeling. Here it was not a mother, as our old poet says, but a father who was "preaching" down a daughter's heart. But Edward and Mrs. Hope so begged and prayed, and she in particular laid so much stress on what she called "the woman" re-asserting itself in Marcia, under favourable circumstances, that I gave way. I was fully justified in my reluctance to take charge of this queer girl, as the sequel will show.

"I cannot enter into details, and must hurry on to the catastrophe. Things went well enough until we had the Kriemhild hauled over and put into ship-shape. This Miss Hope took very ill, quarrelled with us all round, and broke off her engagement with my cousin. They were always a singularly quiet, undemonstrative couple, and a breach between people of that type is much more dangerous than when it occurs between ordinary lovers, who quarrel and make it up ten times a day.

"The climax came after a spell of bad weather. Shall I ever forget it? The cook and his helps, Charley Dobbs, Miss Bates, the children, the nurses and Robert all succumbed. Marcia

and I had to nurse everybody. Edward was captain, chaplain, and doctor.

"The gale subsided, and we were all rejoicing in the burst of sunshine that succeeded. The men were for going on shore on this very island, for the sake of the game they hoped to find. Our fresh provisions had just come to an end. But I was horrified at the idea of savages, perhaps cannibals, getting hold of the boat-party. Everybody laughed at me, but they gave way, or pretended to.

"What followed is still a mystery. My belief is that Marcia wheelled a man named Hallett to let her take his turn at the wheel during the middle watch, and that she purposely tried to run the *Kriemhild* on the rocks.

"Such is the hold Marcia has over the men, that I can learn nothing definite about the matter. You know Robert of old, what an easy-going creature it is, but he can be obstinate and assert his authority at times, and like all the men, at the wrong times. He put down his foot, and absolutely forbade my questioning anybody on board on the subject, and not a soul volunteers a remark upon it. Let me approach it ever so gently, they look as blank and innocent as possible. Old Hallett alone, indeed, looks excessively sheepish when I pass him, but I cannot learn that he has received any punishment for his shameful breach of discipline. The inference of course is that whatever he merited, Miss Hope deserved twice over, she evidently having been the inciter. But there it is. Robert says all is well, and cannot be bettered by talking about it.

"But to return to the accident. We struck. They tell me that if the yacht had had her head a point more east, we must have gone to pieces. They showed me the spot, and I fainted quite away, and think the men themselves must have felt a secret shudder at the sight.

"No wonder that for hundreds of years this island has had a bad reputation. Excepting at one spot, it is inaccessible to mariners. It is guarded by rocks rising sheer out of the sea, some are two or three thousand feet high, they tell me. Vast fragments have been hurled down, and lie at the base, it is supposed by the action of a now extinct volcano. The rest are of the most fantastic shapes. Some like vast animals writhing and twisting one might imagine them ferocious brutes suddenly

petrified in their mortal agonies. Then the noise and look of the surf boiling round the fallen rock are horrible, maddening. It seemed to me like a living thing raging and tearing at the rocks in fury.

"Add to all this the screams of the sea-birds, whirling and swooping about in enormous numbers, and you have a picture of horror Dante might have added to his 'Inferno.'

"The interior of the island must have been devastated by the same volcanic eruption, and the vegetation in many places wholly destroyed. But since then the ghastly charred trunks of trees have been clothed by beautiful climbers, and an artificial soil has been made by dead leaves and things. In some sheltered places, valleys and plains where the mephitic gases passed over, there are still most enormous forest trees, with their rich undergrowth remaining.

"Well, most providentially, we ran on shore in the one safe place, but the *Kriemhild* got jammed between two reefs running out from the island, one much lower than the other, so that she heeled over but stuck fast.

"What followed still remains confusion in my mind. All I know is, that at the last moment Edward went in search of Marcia, who was missing, and that at sight of him the perverse girl jumped into the sea. He plunged after her and seized hold of her by that very 'selection robe' her father bought for her, when she drew her vanishing ticket. Edward is an expert swimmer, and he managed to bring his intractable lady-love safe to shore.

"In the meantime we had landed with comparative ease, for past the reefs the shore was sandy and shoaly. We were in a perfect agony of suspense about this very queer pair of lovers. Something we could see had gone wrong. The tide had turned, and was setting in strong inland. They were washed ashore. Marcia was little the worse, but Edward had been struck on the head by a floating spar, or something, and gave no sign of life. The poor young fellow was suffering from a severe concussion of the brain.

"We found it quite impossible to unloose his grasp of Marcia's 'selection robe,' and we had to cut it out all round. It would have been a thousand pities to hack such beautiful stuff, but then of course the sea-water had ruined it already.

"Fortunately for all concerned, our shipwreck had taken place at daybreak, and as the tide was coming in. At high-tide the Kriemhild floated, and was but little the worse for her drenching. Our men went to work with a will, got out the tents we had supplied ourselves with, put them up, and Edward still insensible was carried into one.

"Another unexpected piece of good luck was the sudden return to good health and activity of Charley Dobbs, the fair young curate we all used to laugh at so unmercifully. During the voyage, he had been a mere dead-weight upon us, being exasperatingly ill the whole time. But directly he touched land, he showed quite a new set of qualities. He had 'walked the hospitals,' and knew all about concussions and fractures (Edward's arm was broken), and he took entire charge of him. I do believe he brought him round as quickly as any regular practitioner could have done.

"As for Marcia, whether her salt-water douche had restored her to her senses, or whether the devotion she had so illdeserved touched the torpid thing she calls a heart, I cannot tell, but the girl was entirely changed. She nursed Edward with the utmost care and tenderness, seeming as if she would try to make up for her previous unwomanly apathy.

"It is not an original remark, that men suffer more in illness than women. It was really dreadful to see Edward's sufferings. This strong, cool, resolute, young fellow, who, Robert says, earned the name of 'Tough' at Cambridge, utterly collapsed in mind and body. At his worst, and he was delirious a great part of the time, he still showed an agonised anxiety about his very ungrateful betrothed. 'Marcia, Marcia,' he muttered incessantly night and day, until I thought I should go mad myself. Charley tried to persuade me this sort of thing was quite mechanical and unconscious, but that I do not believe, because there was decidedly another expression and tone when Marcia was present or out of sight.

"The first sign of recovery shown by our invalid was by holding out his left hand, on the little finger of which was the old Dutch ring which Marcia had so insolently flung at him.

"She took it, all in tears, the first I have ever seen her shed, and put it on, at which Edward showed unmistakable signs of satisfaction, and improved in health directly. At the next

marked stage of recovery, when he was able to speak coherently, he asked her to marry him at once. I suppose he thought if he did not make sure of her at once, she would play him some other awkward prank, and this time escape him for ever. We all agreed it was the best thing to do, to quiet his mind and give him a chance of recovery. So we added our persuasions to his, and the fair lady consented.

"So married they were, and—where do you think?

"Under an enormous tree, whose dome-shaped crown and hundreds of branches stretching out horizontally, and then striking into the ground, suggested to me at once the idea of a cathedral. The coolness and half-gloom, underneath its enormous mass, strengthened the idea.

"Tell dear Mrs. Hope the most anxious mother would have been satisfied with Marcia's appearance on her wedding-day. The wedding-dress and the splendid pearls she confided to my care, set her off most wonderfully. Little did she suspect that I had had them carefully stowed away all the time on board the Kriemhild for this very occasion. Nothing was wanting, even to the orange-flower wreath. The men had scoured the island in search of white flowers, and brought back orange flowers, acacias, lotus, jasmin, oleanders and roses (single) in the greatest profusion.

"Old Hallett (Marcia's accomplice) came to me in great humility, and asked if he might 'rig' the bouquets. I consented, though with much misgiving, for I had snubbed the old wretch rather emphatically. The result was absolute perfection No one, not even a Parisian fleuriste, could have done better, and he is the roughest, ruggedest-looking old fellow imaginable, with hands like the fins of a seal.

"Tottie was the only bridesmaid, and carried a bouquet nearly as big as herself. Miss Bates shyly refused the office, why I did not find out until afterwards.

"Charles Dobbs read the service most impressively, and I assure you we all felt an unusual solemnity during the ceremony, conducted, as the clergyman took occasion to remark to us, in a 'church of God's own making.' Robert gave the bride away, and all went well until the last moment, when Edward who had been carried—into church, I was going to say—basely usurped the bride's privilege by fainting away. We were all in con-

sternation. Marcia knelt down by her bridegroom, despair in her face; the yachtsmen fairly blubbered; Robert gave some suspicious sniffs (he says I was crying, but I'm sure I wasn't!) and the children howled outright. But Charles put us all to rights at once. There was nothing unusual or alarming in Edward's swoon, the result, he said, of excitement acting on a weakened frame. Perfect rest and quiet was all he wanted: he was carried back to his tent. Charley and Marcia resumed their duties as doctor and nurse, and to such good effect, that now (it is six weeks ago) he is as strong as ever.

"'One wedding,' etc., you know. No sooner were Edward and Marcia married than (I think the very next day) Miss Bates informed me that she was engaged to Mr. Dobbs, and hoped for my approval. This, she explained, was the reason she could not act as bridesmaid to Mrs. Vansittart, having but one white gown with her.

"Of course, I congratulated her, and said the usual things, and she left me blushing and happy, just as Robert came in laughing. Charley had, he said, applied to him in a very formal and ceremonious manner, being, as he put it, in loco parentis to Miss Bates, for his approval and consent to their marriage, which, of course, was cheerfully given.

"But now started up a curious difficulty, and this set Robert off laughing.

"Can a clergyman marry himself?

"Under the very peculiar circumstances we have settled that he can.

"Some one suggested a precedent in the example of a Welsh clergyman, who united himself, in his own parish church, with a woman much his inferior in position.* The legality of the marriage was never called into question, though the clergyman was sharply rebuked by his bishop.

"Now Charley belongs to the diocese of Salisbury, and is so far off here that the bishop may rebuke him away to his heart's content (supposing he should ever hear of the irregularity) without hurting him. At any rate he is going, with Miss Bates' approval, to chance it.

"Then Robert reminded him that, by a provision of the law

^{*} Perhaps Lady Barbara was referring to the case of the Rev. David Pryce of Llanwlch.—Note by EDITOR.

of selection, six months after the drawing of our vanishing tickets, we are virtually dead. So no legal process or action can lie against any of us with the exception of Edward and our three children.

"I wish I had time to describe our temporary settlement. I say, temporary, for we have agreed only to spend the winter here. In the spring we shall betake ourselves to the dear old *Kriem-hild*, and sail for the Antilles.

"In the meantime, imagine us living in a Wimbledon Camp on a small scale. It is really a very pretty sight! Our greatest drawback is the land crabs, odious, loathsome things! but the men despatch them by hundreds with heavy knobbed sticks, and their survivors have nearly deserted our part.

"How about the commissariat? you will ask.

"Well, we have abundance of game, fish and fruit, so that we have not once had to resort to our store of tinned provisions since we landed. We have had kid once, but I don't like it. The men eat it, however, and Marcia makes very good nourishing broth of it for her husband.

"The captain of the Albert is getting impatient. I must bring this to an end. There is one thing I must say. I know you drew a blank at the last selection, and are safe for nine years good. In the meantime, dear Chrissie, if you and Lina and Jack will come to us, you will be most welcome.

"The captain says I must 'hurry up!' I know Marcia and Edward would send messages to Mrs. Hope, or rather would have written themselves, but when the *Albert* touched here they were off on an excursion to another part of the island in search of a greater variety of game. Some of the crew have gone with them. I did not like the fatigue for Marcia, but she would go. She will never now be separated from Edward, even for an hour.

"A strange sequel to a strange beginning! May the ending be equally good.

"The captain is here, and growling with impatience.

"A thousand times good-bye, dear Chrissie, from yours ever, "BARBARA CLIFDEN."

A Substitute.

In all the world of journalism no two women writers were better known than Leila Leighton and Letty Lane. They poured out such quantities of copy in the course of the week, that there was hardly a paper without their joint signature. They were "You and I" in the Daily Caterer; "M. and N." in the Weekly Luminary; "Matron and Maid" in the Chimney Corner; and "Bab and Belle" in the New York Times. The amount of work they got through was surprising, and they had learnt to combine their styles so well that you could never have told where one left off and the other began. People who knew them well, declared that Letty's style was the more vivacious, whilst you could detect a subtle flavour of sarcasm in Leila Leighton's But writing so much together, the styles assimilated more and more, and sometimes it was Letty who wrote more finely of the two, and Leila who caught something of the dash of her friend.

"Bab and Belle" figured (on paper) at all kinds of fine entertainments; they were present at the Drawing-room and the Academy soirée; they had a good time at Ascot, and were on a houseboat at Henley, and they went down to Goodwood on a drag. The country reader was much impressed with the idea of all these grandeurs, and pictured the two writers as titled ladies, leading a life of giddy gaiety, and turning out occasional copy by way of filling an idle hour.

The country reader might have been slightly disillusioned had he seen the tiny sitting-room Bab and Belle shared on a third floor in Bloomsbury. The room was shabbily furnished, and the floor was all over scraps of paper, which had been flung towards the waste-paper basket, and had just missed their mark. There were piles of old papers, a tea-pot on the hob, and a writing-table in each window—one very untidy, and one very neat. Leila was the perfection of order, and her table was a source of pride to her. Letty knew where everything was, but her table was outwardly chaotic.

A dark, handsome girl sat at one of the tables writing, her cheek flushed with a hectic glow, her pen tearing over the paper as fast as it would go. When she came to the end of a page, she tore the sheet asunder with a sharp noise, tossed the finished sheet on the top of its fellows, and set to work upon the blank one at once.

"I hope the sound does not disturb you," she said to Leila, soon after they had first settled down to write together; "but it seems to help me when I tear the sheet, and I don't think I could work in any other way."

"You indulge yourself dreadfully," said Leila, shaking her head.

"I do!" responded Letty frankly. "It is hard enough in any case to work so much, in every mood, and in every state of health, and always to get it up to time. I look on my brain as a kind of race-horse who does his work very well on the whole, and if there is anything that helps it work, it seems to me that it ought to have it."

"You will form a number of bad habits like that," said Leila calmly, "and you will find they will master you completely. Then you will be sorry, and you will wish you had taken yourself in hand in time."

"You are dreadfully critical," cried Letty. "I never saw any one with such an analytical mind. I don't believe you care for me at all, seeing all my faults as you do!" And here she threw herself on the ground impulsively, and laid her head against Leila's arm.

"Not care for you!" answered Leila. "Why, I would come from the grave to serve you!"

It had been a rare burst of emotion—the alarming emotion of a self-contained nature, and she had been additionally cold for days afterwards. But Letty never forgot it, and she treasured up the thought of this solitary expression of feeling as though it had been hidden gold.

She was still tearing away at her work (on the day I speak of), when the door opened gently, and Leila came in. A little sallow woman, with a small, pointed face and dark intelligent eyes. She had a stick in her hand, and as she crossed the room, one saw she was slightly lame.

An accident had partially crippled Leila in childhood. Con-

fined for years to the sofa, books had been her only companions, and the habit of writing had been hers long before she had ever thought of turning it to practical account. She had come up to London (as Letty had) with the idea of teaching, and chance had directed both of them towards journalism instead. They were both alone in the world—Leila through a death, Letty through a quarrel, and they met by chance in a ladies' club, and gradually struck up a friendship, which resulted in a working partnership. The union was an excellent one from every point of view, and while Letty did most of the going about, Leila designed the form of the article, wrote a large part of it, and attended to all the business arrangements.

"Have you got it?" cried Letty eagerly, as her friend came in at the door.

"Yes, it is all right," said the little lame woman, sinking down into a chair near the writing-table. "Three columns a week—a little Society, but the greater part about Dress. He's an awful man—the editor! I don't think you had better see him at all."

"Such a martinet?" asked Letty, pausing with her pen in mid-air.

"Such a martinet," replied Leila solemnly, nodding the small head which was shaded by a large hat, "he is quite as bad as Dr. Manns told me when he offered me the introduction. Misunderstands you on purpose, and then jumps down your throat and says you have made a mistake."

"How shall we get on with him?" asked Letty, her face going rather white.

"Well, the great thing is punctuality, and he is quite right in that. His last lady-writer failed him once, and he never employed her again."

"Well, that was natural," said Letty, "you and I have never disappointed any one yet."

"My dear, she simply could not help it," said Leila, "it was not her fault at all. He understood the cause, when it was explained to him, but he said forgiveness was a bad precedent, and he was afraid to get a reputation for being too mild. I don't know what you will do when you see him! I am afraid you would lose your temper—you are so much more impulsive than I. But let me tell you at once what you will have to do. The ladies' letter is to be principally about the advertisers, and the

agent has made an appointment for you to go to Grey's next Monday morning, and you are to write an account of everything in the place."

"That's the most tiring thing in the world," said Lettice, as she noted the day and hour in her engagement-book, "all the black dresses, all the black materials, and all the mourning millinery! Black, black! Nothing but the shape to make you remember the different things."

"And the copy must be in next morning," Leila went on, "so you will have to write it the same day. I can do the society pars, but you do dress so much better than I."

"You did it beautifully when I was away in the autumn," said Lettice, smiling with pleasure at the implied compliment, "only I don't like you to go round the shops—I know it takes it out of you so much."

"I saw two or three members of the staff while I was at the office," said Lelia; "Helen of Troy came in—she is so frightfully plain—and I saw the one who does the etiquette—she was smoking a cigarette."

"Smoking!"

"Yes, she smokes a good deal, and she is rather slangy. Says she gets so tired of writing about propriety she must let the steam off somehow. But she is rather a jolly woman, and of very good family; the father was an honourable, or something, you know."

"You didn't see the Pleasure-seeker, I suppose? I have always wondered so about him."

"No, I didn't see him, but I found out who he is. He is Mr. Trefusis, of the Princess's. The editor asked me what I thought of his criticisms, and I said, 'Well, they read to me as though he never went to the play.' 'More he does,' said the editor sharply; 'he can't! he is playing the Grave-digger in 'Hamlet.'"

"The Pleasure-seeker!" said Letty, and she went off into one of those merry laughs which used to be the envy of the young artist who lived on the next floor, and who used to wish he had a chum himself, or at least knew what the joke could be about.

The veil which hides the future from our eyes is a merciful covering, and Letty would not have laughed so heartily that evening had she known what the next few days would bring forth. Next day came a request from an editor that one of

the two girls should write an account of a journey to the Norfolk Broads; the free pass accompanied the letter, together with a few instructions as to the treatment of the subject. The article was to act in some sort as a decoy-duck to induce other travellers to patronise the same line of steam and rail. The pass was for one, but this was just as well, for the two women never left home together. It was settled that Leila should go, and Letty saw her off at the station, and never forgot her last sight of the dear little face as it looked its farewell from the carriage window. quiet little figure in the long grey cloak, the check hold-all, the yellow-backed novel to be read in the train-all these details impressed themselves unconsciously on Letty's mind, as she stood saying good-bye at the carriage-window. The whistle sounded, the train started, and the little pale face with the large dark eyes looked out of the window as the train went off. Letty never saw it again. Two days afterwards the newspaper boys were doing good business with the evening papers, on account of the fearful accident to a pleasuresteamer on the Norfolk Broads. And Letty was reading the "account by one of the survivors," with her brain reeling, and saying, "It cannot be; it cannot be!" over and over again.

"Amongst the passengers was a little woman in a long grey cloak, who was travelling all alone. She showed singular courage in the moment of danger and was doing her best to soothe the other women, who were uttering distracted cries. She might have got off to the boats with the rest, but she could not walk so fast—she was lame."

"If you please, mum, I think there's something wrong with Number Three," said the lodging-house servant a little later. "I went in to ast her if she'd like her supper and she set staring at me as though she didn't hear. And she ain't touched her tea, and she looks real awful, with her face like death, all except a red spot on each cheek."

True enough, Letty was ill, and mercifully unconscious of the trouble that had caused it. It was always of her work that she raved, as she lay there. Now she was going through a picture-gallery, now she was at the theatre and could not see. Now she was trying to describe a shop, but they would hurry her on so fast—they would bring another mantle before she had

half described the last! And what miles of weary stairs from one department to the other! She would never reach the next floor. The landlady had called in the doctor, who had soon sent a nurse, and ordered that Letty's stepmother should be sent for. The poor little silly woman sat crying at the door of the sickroom, not allowed to enter, for fear of agitating the patient over much. Little did she think when she quarrelled with the independent girl what a sad set of circumstances was to bring them together again. The third day of the illness there was a change for the better, and the nurse, watching by the bedside, saw that the fever had left her for a time.

- "What day is it?" asked the girl, after a long silence.
- "Friday," replied the nurse.
- "Nothing that need be done till Monday," said the girl, turning wearily on her pillow; "how lucky I wrote so much in advance last week!"
- "What is it on Monday? Nothing that matters?" suggested the nurse gently.
- "Grey's—don't you remember?" said Lettice, "all the black mantles and all the black gowns. The editor would never forgive me if I failed the very first time."
 - "How is she to-day, Nurse?" asked the doctor next day.
- "Well, she seems worse again this morning," said the woman simply, "and she does nothing but moan about her work. It is so dreadful; none of us know what she wants to do, and we don't know any of the papers she writes for, and whether we ought to write and say she's ill."
- "We must get her well first, that's the important thing," said the doctor, and he wrote a fresh prescription before he went off on his rounds.

But the fever appeared to increase, and when the Monday came she remembered her appointment, and it was scarcely possible to keep her in bed.

"I must go! I must go!" she kept crying; "I have got to go all over the establishment. And the editor is such a martinet. You don't want me to offend him the very first time I begin?" She got so restless at last that the nurse had recourse to a sleeping draught; under the influence of this the patient sank to rest, and remained sleeping long after the time for the appointment was gone.

It was another week yet before Letty recovered and set herself to work to gather up the scattered threads of her life. The thought of pleasure was gone from her, with the irretrievable loss she had sustained, only the idea of duty remained, and she set herself sternly to take up her work. She sat up in bed with letters and papers all round her, attending to her corrrespondence column which was sadly in arrears, and long before the nurse thought her well enough to walk, she had got into her clothes with trembling hands, and set off to pay that deferred visit to Grey's. There was a stony look in her face which had never been there before. She never mentioned Leila, and no one dared to speak of her.

"She would be much better if she would cry," said the nurse, but she is saving up every atom of strength in the hope of regaining her work."

It was a faded, wan figure that dragged itself into the great mourning warehouse and explained its business to a brisk and smiling manager.

"Come to take notes for the Grosvenor Gazette? The man who generally manages these things is away, but we shall be delighted to show you everything, I am sure." And he ushered his visitor into the department for ready-made gowns, where a tall young woman dressed like a fashion-plate came forward to welcome her.

"For the Grosvenor Gazette?" said the woman, "it is very good of you. But we have had an article so recently, I don't think you will be able to find anything fresh to say. They sent us a lady from the office, and the article appeared last week."

"They sent you a lady?" gasped Letty, her heart sinking as she realised that her place had been filled, "they sent you a lady? what was she like?"

"A little lame woman, dressed in grey," said the woman, she was very quiet, but she took great pains."

"A little lame woman!" repeated Letty, turning deadly white; "it was after the steamer went down!"

So her place had been taken and her work continued, while she lay unconscious in her bed. The little lame woman had kept her word. She had come from the grave to save her friend.

LUCIE H. ARMSTRONG.

Fulfilled.

A STORY OF FATE.

INTRODUCTION.

My object in placing the following story before the public has a two-fold reason.

Firstly, in fulfilment of a promise made to my dead brother, and secondly to give to the world a weird story of the supernatural. Much has been written about the hidden forces of nature, but only a few have shown to them glimpses of the Unseen, or have had drawn aside for them the thin veil which separates the Living from the Dead.

My unfortunate brother was one of those to whom was revealed the Future of a life, destined to undergo much trouble, and finally to end ignominiously

Six months ago he was tried for murder by twelve of his own countrymen, and condemned to death.

I at his request publish an account of the events which led to his committing that crime which he has now so fully expiated, hoping that perhaps a generous public will partially exonerate him, believing that he was led by a something stronger than his own will, which I will call Fate.

The following is his strange history, written by himself.

CHAPTER L

I, HERBERT LEICESTER, was born in 1860 in the town of Winchester. My father, a retired admiral, lived with my mother, brother and myself, a quiet, peaceful existence in one of the quaint, old-fashioned houses that abound in that old world cathedral town.

Looking back on that life so particularly calm, I sometimes wonder why the horrors which presently over-shadowed me, hid themselves so completely from my view.

Was it to give me strength of endurance? I sometimes think so, for mind as well as body matured in the fresh country air, where the tumult of life seemed so far away, and the nerves were lulled to rest by the tranquility of the scene.

I remained at Winchester and was educated by a private tutor until I went to Oxford, where I took a degree.

On my return home my father informed me that it was his wish that I should travel for a year before seriously commencing to read for the Bar.

The idea of a holiday, and the pleasant anticipation of seeing strange countries delighted me, and it was with excellent spirits that I said "good-bye" to the old cathedral town and started for the Continent.

I visited Paris, Brussels, Cologne, Berlin, Rome, Naples, Venice, Florence, and many other well known cities.

After six months' incessant travelling, I resolved to penetrate into some of the beautiful wild passes of the Carpathian Mountains of which I had read much and had long wished to see.

Their solitudes (so refreshing after my sojourn in noisy foreign hotels), the boldness of their outline, combined with delicacy of colouring, charmed me even more than I had anticipated.

One evening, after walking all day amidst most beautiful scenery, I lost my way, and twilight coming swiftly found me vainly endeavouring to regain the path that led back to the small village where I had been staying.

I looked round on every side, but saw nothing to indicate the direction from which I had started; the road which at first had been fairly broad, now seemed at each step to become narrower, and the lights waned every moment.

Still I pressed onward, fearing to leave the small path, and hoping that even if it would not take me back to the village that at least it would lead me to some place of shelter. This indeed, was becoming very necessary, as not only was there a thick mist rising all round, but fine rain was beginning to fall.

I walked on for an hour, each moment feeling more tired, when suddenly I perceived before me a building, which seemed as if it were carved out of the solid rock.

It was a gigantic structure, but there was little light to observe more, and I was too tired to feel anything but intense relief at finding what I hoped would be shelter. I soon discovered an entrance, but no bell; however, after knocking loudly I heard footsteps coming, and the door was cautiously unlocked and the head of a man appeared.

"Who are you?" he said.

"A traveller who has lost his way and implores shelter and rest," I replied.

The door was then opened and I saw before me a man dressed in the habit of a monk,

"Follow me," he said, and I was indeed glad to do so.

He led the way into a comfortable, well-lighted room, where I saw seated about twenty men dressed in a similar garb to that of my conductor.

"My brothers," said he, "the stranger craves shelter, shall we not grant it?"

"We will," said an old man, who appeared to be the Superior of the Order. "The Mystic Brotherhood of Fatalists bids you welcome."

Food was then set before me, and after I was refreshed, the Superior took me down several dark passages and then opened a door which led into a bedroom, which, though simple in its appointments, had an air of comfort by no means displeasing to me.

I thanked him warmly for his kindness, and I asked him if he would inform me what was the order for whose hospitality I was so sincerely grateful.

"My friend," the Superior replied, "we are The Mystic Brotherhood of Fatalists, of many nationalities; we have banded ourselves together to wrest from Nature her most hidden secrets. By acknowledging the superiority of mind over matter, we have learnt to look into the great future."

I was astounded. I had heard of societies whose object was the study of occult sciences, but to find one in the heart of the Carpathians seemed indeed strange to me.

"Can you tell me what is before me in my own life?" I asked, with all a young man's ardour, my curiosity roused by the old man's words.

"I can," he replied, "but I wish you to pause before granting your request—it may not be well to know it."

"Show it to me," I cried. "Should my fate be one of sorrow, knowing it will not make it darker."

The old man did not answer, but extinguished the lamp he held, and we were in total darkness. Suddenly, the end of the room grew light, and I saw forming before me a large church where a fashionable wedding had just taken place, and there I

perceived myself in the position of a bridegroom, and leaning on my arm was a lovely girl, who had just been made my wife.

This scene seemed to melt slowly into another, and I saw a crowded ball-room, the light of many wax candles shed their soft brilliance around, flowers abounded, beautifully-dressed women danced with men in bright uniforms, and there was myself looking on and watching with jealous eyes a couple who were waltzing in the middle of the room.

Then all became misty once more, and the scene changed to a moon-lit garden. I saw two figures, a man and a woman, their faces were invisible to me, but it was easy to see they were lovers.

As I watched them I saw the man lean forward and kiss the woman.

At that moment another figure sprang out of the gloom and pointed a pistol at the head of the man—he fired—and the other fell.

To my horror, I recognised the murderer as myself!

Once more the scene faded from my view, and there appeared before me a cheerless prison cell, empty save for the bare necessities of existence, and in it I saw myself sitting with bowed head.

At that moment, the old man re-lit the lamp. Turning towards him, I noticed in his eyes a troubled expression, and then he seemed to recede from me, and I felt myself falling, and remembered no more until the next morning I found myself in bed, with the sun streaming in through the windows, and a young monk bringing a tray with breakfast to my bedside.

CHAPTER II.

SEVERAL years passed by, and though at first I was much disturbed with what I had seen in the old monastery, yet after a time I succeeded in convincing myself that it was either a trick on the part of the old man or a delusion on mine.

In due time I was called to the Bar, and in the midst of a busy, active life, almost forgot my unpleasant experience.

During a short rest and holiday, which I spent in the Highlands, I fell in love with a very pretty girl, gained the consent of her parents, and obtained her promise to become my wife.

After a short engagement our marriage was fixed to take

place in London. For some reason or another I did not visit the church until my wedding morning, when I suddenly recognised it to be the building of my vision in the old monastery of the Carpathian Mountains!

I was horrified.

Before my mind rose the other pictures which I had almost forgotten, the ball-room with its gladness, the garden with its tragedy, and the prison cell with its gloom.

My troubled looks were noticed, and the best man came and reminded me that my bride had come, and I must meet her.

With an effort I pulled myself together, and the ceremony proceeded. After our honeymoon I settled once more to my work. I received a great many briefs, and in the course of time became a rising barrister.

My wife, whose name was Mildred, seemed to like London life, and our house soon became the haunt of men and women of fashion. I was very happy then. Much interested in my profession, and possessing a beautiful wife, I seemed to have realized my wildest anticipations. How could I imagine, when all seemed calm, that a storm was gathering round my home which would wreck my life?

One of our most frequent visitors was a young man named Morton, who professed great friendship for me. He was clever, and his writings were beginning to be known and appreciated in the world of letters.

Gradually I became aware of a flirtation between this man and my wife. At first I refused to believe it, but after a time I could no longer close my eyes to the fact that Mildred encouraged him, and in her manner to myself I noticed a growing coldness.

I said nothing, but determined to watch my wife.

Soon it became evident to me that she had secret meetings with Morton, and would return from them nervous and excited, accounting for her prolonged absence in a very unsatisfactory way.

Still I waited, saying nothing, but watching her closely.

One day I picked up, on the floor of Mildred's room, a fragment of a letter in Morton's handwriting, in which he alluded to a ball that was to take place that evening in a neighbouring house, and saying it would be a good place for a long conversation. After dinner I informed my wife that I should accompany her to the party, at which she seemed surprised, as I did not usually attend festivities of that kind.

Coming out of my room, where I had been to fetch my gloves, my eyes fell upon a pistol-case, given me by my brother a few months before.

Without any particular idea in my head, I opened it, took out one of the pistols, saw that it was loaded, and put it in my pocket.

Hearing Mildred calling me, I hurried down the stairs, and we were soon on our way to the ball.

My wife's arrival caused as usual a great sensation. She was looking particularly beautiful that evening in a rich white satin dress, with diamonds and pearls sparkling on her fair neck and arms.

She was soon surrounded by partners, and presently I saw Morton join her, and write his name several times on her programme, and then lead her to the dancing room.

As I watched them, with fierce jealousy in my heart, I fancied I had seen the room somewhere before that night. Then I remembered I had seen it in the vision of my fate.

Morton seemed perfectly unconscious of my scrutiny, and looked lovingly into my wife's eyes, as they waltzed together to the tune of "El Dorado." After the dance was over, they went into the garden, I following closely, but taking care not to be seen.

They crossed the lawn and passed down a dark avenue, over-shadowed by chestnut trees.

Half-way they stopped, and he put his arms round her and kissed her tenderly, not once, but many times. I felt a frenzy of passion overcoming me, and, without pausing to think, I rushed forward, and pulling the pistol out of my pocket I fired, and Morton fell, shot through the heart.

My wife ran screaming to the house, leaving me alone with the body.

I seemed like one in a dream, and have only a confused recollection of many voices, and being led away from the spot. I was committed for trial, and found guilty of taking the life of a fellow creature, and condemned to death.

Here in this cell closes the last realization of the four scenes shown me in the monastery, and my Fate foretold there has been fulfilled.

MAUDE FIELD

The Lifted Veil.

THE literary executors of the late Hanham Glass, F.R.S., M.D., and late Professor of Physiology at the Institute of Scientists, Esq. desire to make public the following strange narration found amongst his papers after his death. The authorship of the MS. is not to be conjectured, nor is any attempt towards identification possible or desirable at this date; but, from the marginal annotations and expositions, in the doctor's cramped characteristic hand, which figure in profusion throughout the pages of the document, one may assume its commentator's own conviction as to the importance of such evidence in its relation to psychological research. Had he lived longer, Dr. Glass would probably have embodied the record in that new volume of his scientific series which he was projecting at the date of his death, and which was to deal with the pathological analysis of morbid phenomena. Indeed, so much is to be gathered from his notes, which insist, moreover, upon his positive acquittance—in view of the then recent decease of the anonymous writer of the MS. of any suggestion of abuse of confidence in making public what should be of moment to the entire world of physiologists.

"The tendency to melodrama," he writes, "observable in the course of the narrative, detracts very little, to my mind, from the value of the evidence. The writer was a man of small learning, yet of an order of intelligence supremely susceptible to the picturesque in impressions, and to the stronger contrasts of light and shade that express the abnormal. At the same time, he was possessed of the sturdiest natural instincts, and was most prone to reject evidence, of whatsoever description, that failed to appeal to his common sense. I have no hesitation in accepting, on my knowledge of him, his statement as substantially true in fact. It was put into writing by him at my request, and on the understanding that it should be submitted to outer criticism anonymously, if at all; as the connection of his published name with so equivocal an experience would certainly affect his reputation as a sane man of business."

Such may be deemed sufficient introduction in itself; and it remains only to say that, in view of the strictly technical, if profound and luminous, character of the annotations, where decipherable, it is thought best to print the narrative as it stands, and without more than an occasional reference to Dr. Glass's marginal comments, which, existing as they do merely in embryo, would otherwise both weaken the force of the evidence and, perhaps, fail to convince from their own very immaturity.

The MS, is headed as follows:-

"The experience here set down I testify to be absolutely true, and wishing to remain anonymous for reasons that would be obvious to all who know me for a plain business man, I here, in proof of its bona fides, set my mark, which Dr. Glass, who is acquainted with me and my name, will witness."

Hereupon follow the sign and attestation, and, upon an inset of separate paper, some elucidatory matter by the doctor, which serves to introduce him in his first connection with the affair. It runs thus:

"April the 17th, 1884, while acting as *locum tenens* for a fellow practitioner, was summoned to a house in neighbourhood of British Museum, about 9.30 o'clock in the evening. A young man, thirty-five or thirty-six years of age, had died suddenly, while sitting smoking with a companion, from failure of the heart's action. Subsequently a curious statement confided to me by the friend, which I after prevailed upon the latter to reduce to writing."

The MS. then proceeds as follows:

I have attended two inquests only in my life—the first in the capacity of juryman; the second as a witness. The subject of the latter enquiry was, curiously enough, the son of the subject of the former, and an interval of three years separated the two events.

I may say that I dread nothing more than a summons of this description. I am a matter-of-fact and healthy-minded man, but a coroner's court seems to me little better than an official charnel house. For weeks after attending in such a place its atmosphere seems to deaden my social landscape, and take all the breezy relish from life. The world looks to me actually grey, as it does during an attack of nervous dyspepsia. The hideous remains packed for inspection into cheap shells—the sordid surroundings (the court is generally within a court, like disease in a suit of ragged clothes)—the ugly curiosity of my fellow jurymen and of the gloating crowd—the smell of fustian and of cold distempered walls-all these get into my thoughts and my bed and my food, and poison my impressions of familiar life for long after the ordeal is passed, and until the springs of nature freshen in me again with time. And the worst of it is, I know I should be shiftingly uneasy with a sense of damaged self-respect were I to shirk my share of a duty which is a common penalty of the social order we profit by. That is a morbid sensitiveness, perhaps, and akin to that that drives the murderer back to the scene of his crime. Maybe, too, it is a sort of guarantee of something higher than intelligence, if you look at it in the right light—not that I of all men need the assurance of an existence beyond the grave. However, facts are better than speculations, and here are mine.

In the winter of the year 1881, I was acting as publishing clerk to a firm in Great Queen Street, and one afternoon I was summoned to attend on a coroner's jury. We were in the parish of St. George's in the Fields, and the court was held in another as unsavoury off Drury Lane; and thither, in a dank November twilight. I trudged through the cold slush of half-melted snow. A hubbub of squalid gutter elfs rose and fell about the door of the building, and in the opening a chilled policeman blew upon his finger tips to warm them. On the dreary brick court walls an oily moisture shone and trickled that seemed to me like a deathsweat from the bodies that lay hidden in the upper rooms. entered and stood among my unwholesome fellows to await the arrival of the coroner. The room was fairly crowded, and its blank walls re-echoed whisperings from angle to angle. ghostly influence of the place wrapped me in like a shroud. Life seemed concentrated into one stealthy, monotonous murmur, as though I lay buried beneath the pavement of a church. tried to give my mind passage to a pleasant memory here, a pictured retrospect there; but it would never work independently of its surroundings.

Presently the coroner arrived and we were ushered upstairs to view the bodies. Three of them there were. One poor wretch, a German, lay in his coffin with shattered skull and a bloody cloth wrapped about it—suicide, the verdict. Another body was that of an old poor woman, shrunken, starved—an ordinary case. The third subject was an aged man with thin white hair and fearful wrinkles about his mouth and middle brow. It is of him I write in this first instance of my story.

He lay in a common coffin, in the common dead room; yet he was a Baronet and possessed of considerable property. He had devoted much of his life to ministering to the needs of the most degraded among the poor, and had latterly volunteered to sit up with a patient suffering from diphtheria, on whom the operation of tracheotomy had been performed. In the dead of night the tube had clogged, and the watcher had sucked it free. A hero's death befell him in consequence and the apotheosis of the mortuary.

At the inquest a strange letter was put in which he had written upon his death-bed, and which was addressed to his only son. The coroner glanced through it, ruled it irrelevant, and it was not made public. Afterwards, however, it was given me to read by him to whom it was addressed, and is now actually in my possession. I quote it here in full.

"My son, whom I cannot claim, I reveal myself to you on my death-bed. At the eleventh hour I throw down the tangled skein of faith and will no more of it. I charge you never to take it up. I charge you to address your mind, your body, your endeavours to sweet and wholesome happiness and the selfishness of unretributive pleasures. I that say this am your father, and for two-and-thirty years I have not looked upon your face, or sought your mother in it, or claimed you mine. Go, when you receive this to the firm of——* They have been my faithful advisers and friends for the last thirty odd years. They have my full instructions, and will make known to you your position, and the position of the father of whose very existence you knew nothing. I charge you again to enjoy to the full the advantages of the new fortune that shall fall to you—to be gay, light-hearted, selfish of your tranquility in its possession—to sacrifice

^{*} Editorially omitted.

your happiness to no impulse that may resolve itself into a lifelong martyrdom.

"I have latterly written for you the story of my life, which will be handed to you by the same firm.

"Make a happier use of your position than I ever did of mine.

"YOUR DYING FATHER."

Now this, I take it, was fairly strange advice alone from one who had sacrificed some thirty years of his life and the bulk of his annual income to the good of his humbler fellows. But—to quote an odd old lady I know of—"there's nothing so queer as folk." The man was a strange character, and his story, as I came to hear it afterwards from his son's lips, a record of noble madness. I may appropriately outline it here, using his own words where necessary.

The Baronet, Sir—* was, in the year '47 a more or less typical representative of the wholesomer of his class. Refined, cultivated, healthful and well-to-do, he had for some forty years lived a bachelor existence of tranquil pleasures and easy duties that were never so disturbing as to more than ruffle the sunny serenity of his lot. He was a dilettante, a bit of a mystic, a man of many quiet resources, and the vexing waters of toil flowed so far from him as to merely soothe his soul as with a sound of pleasant murmuring. To his self-centred calm, the fact contributed that he was the last of an unprocreative race, and that his Castle of Indolence was unharassed of parasitic relations.

Suddenly, however, all this tranquillity fled to the winds. He fell in love, with all the determined passion of middle age, sunk his ancient distinction of character in a dishonourable connection with a parentless village girl, and married her in time to legitimize their son. Henceforth the fever burned itself through three years, and then the mother died of consumption. He had not conceived the possibility of so fearful an outrage of fate befalling him. Through the latter months of his wife's sickness he had tended her with a slow curious growth of agony in his soul that there was after all no patent of Providence to set him apart from his fellows—that he was born, with the beggar, to

^{.*} Editorially omitted.

the mischance of death and the heritage of suffering. Then a morbid horror seized him that his hitherto immunity was the earnest of his moral destruction; that the God of Humanity had indeed set him aside, in his wealth and indolence, as useless to His scheme of regeneration—a toy to be broken and thrown away by-and-by—a worthless pretty gaud to fit the fashion of the times.

For weeks after his wife's death he tramped the streets of London day and night, and never rested; and brick by brick his Castle of Indolence toppled about his ears. He was stunned, bewildered, morbidly fascinated by all he heard and saw and experienced; and when at last his former stronghold was level with its foundations he had resolved upon the course from which he never after swerved to the finish of his life—a self-effacement more stern and complete than that of any ancient royal hermit.

No doubt there was a blot of madness staining the family tree somewhere like a bunch of evil fruit.

He now appointed the firm mentioned in his letter guardians over his baby son, leaving with them minutest detailed directions as to his bringing up. He was to be given an assumed name and to be kept in absolute ignorance of his true position and parentage. What funds were necessary to his good maintenance and training were to be drawn from the income of the estate, and, upon coming of age, he was to be granted an allowance sufficient to keep him in respectability, but not in idleness. But his face his father had ruled himself never to see again. This, the consummation of his irresponsible romance of life, should be his dearest guarantee of its renouncement. It was easier to forego titular and social aggrandisement, and these he sacrificed with his income. With the bulk of the latter he purposed to feed the whirlpool of necessity, and into the same moaning throat to cast the wreck of all his ancient hopes and comforts. He disappeared from the life he had lived in as completely as if he had gone down at sea. His world knew him no more, and the toiling sordid East Endwoke to the presence of a new grave comforter of substantial influence. His only link with the past was maintained, chiefly through correspondence, with the aforesaid advisers.

And he stuck to it. Such cases do occur occasionally, without doubt—such oblique visions of a vocation that distort the

honest face of duty and run perilously close to religious mania. He stuck to it; but with what result to himself let the following passages, gleaned from his communication to his son, show:

"Then I walked from a garden into a desert—blind, staring, hideous. . . . For thirty years have I toiled and suffered in the name of Christ, yielding my all of health, comfort and happiness—and what at last is my reward? The conviction that our self-wrought destiny is death; our doom annihilation; our God an ugly dramatic fiction . . . I have walked amidst suffering till my soul has grown leprous: I have stood helpless by agony unendurable, and heard the priests damn it for blaspheming: I have suffered a hundred deaths . . . No reward can atone for the past: no walls of jasper and onyx shut out the memory of what has been. Great God! What have I not seen and heard in these noisome shambles of Moloch? Let me be wiped out and rest and be forgotten . . . I have no retrospects to soothe the intolerable horror of my vision. I look through the steaming stench of suffering and my past is poisoned. I could recover nothing of the old life by returning to it, for the knowledge of these my neighbours would be with me. The limits of creation could not dim that consciousness . . . I have failed and long for death. Oh, my son—my son, whose natural claims upon me I have forsworn! be true to your best instincts and fastidious in your choice of happiness; crush under the morbid devil in you that lusts to experience if ever he shall rear his head! wrap yourself in the enjoyments of life as in flowers, for there is nothing beyond."

What was the life this man had sacrificed with such apparent nobility?

The object of this last solicitude was present at the inquest, but was not called upon for evidence. I saw him, a slender, delicate-looking man of thirty-two, plain in features, with a little ragged, rusty beard and mild large eyes. His thin face was deadly pale—and no wonder. Realize the mine of circumstances sprung upon him—the recent revelations of his history and parentage—his sudden leap from obscurity to wealth and position!

An old, portly man—probably one of his father's advisers—was with him throughout, but left before the jury was dismissed.

As I passed with the crowd through the door and along the pavement without, I found myself behind the newly-elect baronet, and suddenly he reeled and fell into my arms. He had broken down at the last and fainted. I sent for a cab, with assistance got him into it, and drove off with him to my place of business. On the way he partly recovered, and, on reaching our destination, was able to walk with me into my private office where I induced him to sip some weak whisky and water.

This was the beginning of a curious acquaintanceship between us. Our paths in life were of course widely divergent; but he found, I think, a strange moral support in the matter-of-fact side of my character. For he turned out to be a true son of his father-morbid, inclined to mysticism and prone to dark scruples of conscience. What he had done with his crippled life hitherto I could never quite make out; but this I understood -that he had preferred struggling along upon his limited allowance to making any effort to increase it by drudgery. The mystery of his birth he had been content to accept as insolvable, the more so as he feared investigation would prove him illegitimate. He read a great deal at the British Museum, and took a house in Bloomsbury Square to be near it. He was very shy, soft-spoken and retiring, and the nine days' wonder of notoriety that succeeded the inquest was cruelly galling to his sensitiveness. The world left him alone, however, after a time. and he laid himself out to court social neglect.

For the first year of our acquaintance I was frequently in his company. He extended a general invitation to me to drop in of an evening whenever the whim should seize me and smoke a pipe with him. I often availed myself of this. The man interested me oddly; and when his shyness wore off, he proved himself a cultivated and well-informed companion. It was at this time that he made me acquainted with the contents of his father's first and last communication to him. The nature and purport of it were naturally of absorbing moment to him, and in the attempted interpretation of its inner meaning he would often grow moody and, in his speech, to me at least, obscure. He cherished no resentment towards the old man for his treatment of him. Rather he exhibited an unwholesome sympathy with his final

despair and a most profound pity of the necessity of his martyrdom. Out of this gradually grew an intense morbid desire to satisfy himself as to the possibilities of a future state. It haunted him day and night, and found frequent expression in his conversation.

"That all should end in this! Iago, the pity of it!" he would say. I combated his gloomy heathenism with the broadsword play of my own breezy confident faith; but I knew all along that I lacked his deadlier weapon, imagination—that petard which, though liable to hoist its own engineer, is invariably the destruction of the little forts of formulæ we plain men throw up. We are no match for the enemy that undermines our conventional beliefs with explosive theories.

In the early Spring of 1883 my friend went abroad, and I saw no more of him for thirteen months; when, upon the 17th of April, in the following year, he entered my room, just as I was in the act of turning the cock of the gas upon my day's official labours, and asked me to return home with him to dinner.

It was a stinging cold evening, and the east wind rumbled in the chimneys, as if the house were flatulent with dyspepsia. Outside, the pavement was grated clean with flying dust, and the jets of the lamps glinted like eyes bright with fever. My companion and I butted the gale with shrugged shoulders and exchanged few words as we made our way towards Bloomsbury Square. I had noticed at his first greeting that thirteen months of Europe had been apparently of small health service to him, and that he was looking ill and prematurely old. Yet his manner had been quietly genial and free from nervousness. Once, while talking to me in the office, he had turned suddenly faint, and I, a little scared, had pressed some stimulant upon him—but he would none of it.

"I don't like these fillips of Dutch courage," he said with a weak smile. "The principle of the moral economy of life is that the soul should exist self-supporting."

"But the perishable frame, my friend-" I began-

"Is subject to the same control," he said. Then his countenance fell. "But is it, is it, is it?" he muttered to himself.

"I have been theorising and experimenting and practising

since I saw you last," he said more cheerfully, looking up into my face.

"Upon what?"

"Upon myself. I find it is possible for the spirit to temporize with the conditions of life without submitting slavishly to their tyranny—possible for it on occasion to hold them in suspension. In the end the exit is voluntary."

"What exit?" said I.

"Death," he answered.

"Well," I said, "I am a plain man of business, and want my dinner."

. He laughed and rose and followed me into the street.

At eight o'clock that evening, the meal over, we were sitting in my friend's library smoking. The gas had not been kindled, as we were both wont to fancy the ruddy twilight of a warm fire-crimsoned hearth more conducive to the repose of desultory conversation than the whiter blaze. Sir ——* leaned back in his chair, his face, without the radius of the fire-glow, set in deep shadow. The room in which we sat was at the back of the house and quite undisturbed of the vexing rattle of the streets. It was heavily curtained, and the wall over against the hearth was lined with sombre books. Ancient pictures here and there shot little oily gleams into the darkness, and a shadowy intent bust over the book case took on strange plays of expression in the wavering and jerking of the coal gas.

My companion had been all the evening in a curious frame of mind—morbidly capricious I should pronounce it. He had fallen from mood to darker mood—as a body that plunges into an icy crevasse drops from shelf to shelf—and yet had not plumbed the frozen depths of his imagination. The subject of his dead father's communication, from being uppermost in his mind had come to absorb all its wholesomer impulses, and months of Continental travel seemed only to have intensified the mournful fascination it exercised over him. To-night the string upon which he wearisomely harped was the possibility of forget-fulness in a future state.

"I cannot comprehend it," was the sum of his gloomy discourse. "If what has been, is and must be, memory would

channel the heart of Heaven like a cancer. Could one forget and remain a pure intelligence? Could one remember and make sport of past horrors that had turned one's human heart grey with agony? To paint over the black of suffering with white is not to erase it."

. He sighed and threw the butt of his cigar into the fading fire. The invisible clock on the mantelpiece chimed the half-hour.

"My dead father," he said, "stands before my imagination to-night like Hamlet's. Does he only exist now in mine and others'? A sorry consummation to his awful sacrifice—to be the creature of any common fancy that chooses to recall him. Where is he, Harry, where is he?"

His voice cracked, and he jerked in his chair and drew a deep breath.

I thought it well not to encourage his depressed imaginings and was silent. Suddenly he spoke again, but in an altered voice.

"It is a beautiful, terrible mystery. The earth is but a bead in the sweet rosary of nature's religion. The wonder falls in the dew and sprouts in the flowers that are fragrant in death."

I felt little surprise at his change of tone, but rather welcomed it, with an easing sigh, as indicative of an inclination to healthier moods. I was not unaccustomed to these his rhapsodical ventings of a moral dyspepsia. Only I was conscious that in this instance his words sent a strange shock of happiness throughout me. They impressed me with the sense of an intolerable burden suddenly thrown off. But his speech flowed on with a low soothing sound as of distant waters.

"What little doubts—what petty misgivings in the light of an overwhelming truth! Forgetfulness! Why, who would have it, and forego the pride, the pity and the ecstasy! To have been part of so wondrous a scheme, and to desire degradation to the ranks of the non-fighters—the poor carpet knights! 'Corruption wins not more than honesty!' Oh, Harry, we can triumph over suffering!"

And so, in a low eager monotone he wandered on, and I had no desire to interrupt him. For the matter of his discourse was wonderful in the extreme, though such as, half-remembered,

would ring but thinly in the repetition. He gave such play to his imagination as I had not thought possible in him, mystic though he was, and enthralled me—the plain, common mind—with interpretations of the inscrutable that presented the solemn mystery of life in a manner to thrill me with the pride of being.

He urged me to be good—to be good!—to be always good and true to the highest instincts in me. He spoke of the pathetic beauty of our world with a divine realism that filled my eyes with unshed tears. He translated to me thoughts—the silent language of knowledge that is Truth beautiful and limitless, of which I had been only dumbly conscious hitherto. He showed my soul the secret of its cage's fastenings, and bade it stretch its wings and soar away into the boundless fragrant heavens.

Twice again did I hear the clock chime — the hour and half-hour—while he spoke thus, and I listened fascinated, and put in no word of my own. Then a little sound came outside the door, and his voice stopped on the instant with a sibilant murmur that reemed to reel up to the ceiling.

His man entered with a tray of glasses and decanters which he placed softly on the table. He then kindled the gas from an electric rod he held in his hand. The leap of white light blinded me for a moment, and in that moment I heard the man gasp and his rod rattle on the floor.

"God Almighty!" he exclaimed in an awful whisper, and took a hasty step towards his master.

I looked, and saw the latter huddled back in his chair, his face of a drawn ashy whiteness, his jaw fallen, his hand trailing limply against the carpet. I rose to my feet with a horrified cry.

"He is dead, sir," muttered the man, half whimpering.

"Impossible!" I said, "he___"

I hurried to him and took his hand—it came up heavy and chilled. I looked into his face—the eyes were partly open, viscous and unspeculative.

"Run—run for a doctor!" I cried.

I knelt by his side while the man was gone, in a whirl of suffocating thoughts and emotions. In ten minutes Dr. Glass entered the room. He made a brief examination and then raised himself upright and addressed me gravely.

- "There is nothing to be done," he said.
- "He is dead?"
 - "He has been dead for over an hour!"
- I stared at him incredulously.
- "That is quite impossible," I whispered.
- "And why so?"

He inclined his head towards me in some surprise.

- "You stake your professional reputation on it?"
- "On what?"
- "On that—that he died more than an hour ago?"

He shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"You are a little overwrought, sir," he said. "Yes; I stake my professional reputation on that."

He seized me, or I should have fallen. I felt faint and stunned. I begged him to lead me into another room, and not to quit the house till I could speak with him further. For a time I believe I, the man of most Philistine common sense, was feverish and hysterical. When, later in the night I recovered, I made that statement to him, which is here at his request set down in writing.

So ends the manuscript, and what more can be added? At the ensuing inquest the jury, according to Dr. Glass's notes, gave in a verdict of death from disease of the heart, and his friend, the author of the MS., was understood to explain that no doubt the catastrophe had occurred while he (the friend) was unconsciously dozing in his chair.

"This statement, however," the Doctor adds, "was a conventional one, given to evade the responsibility of explanation. To the last the man persisted to me in asserting the absolute truth of his story as here set down."

BEVIS CANE.

A Bereditary Curse.

PROLOGUE.

In the old castle where she was born there she lay dead—the most beautiful and gracious lady in the land. Kind alike to grand and simple. The great gates were closed and within was weeping.

The young Earl, her son, paced the ancestral hall . . . now his, without demur. He had proposed evicting the Countess this very year. Death had spared him the committal of that outrage. A pale, vacuous face his, already stamped with that hereditary curse which had foredoomed successive generations.

And the serene semblance upstairs arranged in state, from which the soul had severed. Through weeks of half-death it had struggled, drawn and distorted the lovely outlines of the sweet countenance, but now they were as they had been when all was well. So marvellously composed they seemed to smile as she had ever smiled in kindly greeting then, now in last farewell.

It was a decade since the late Earl had died. He had been a fond husband even to the moment when his Bacchus-blurred person was entombed in a derogatory grave.

"Wherever you go, Elfrida, you are always the handsomest woman there," he would say to her proudly.

Watford, the present Earl of Shafton and Shafto, was the 12th earl in the peerage of Great Britain and Ireland, and removed by comparatively few heads from the Imperial summit. As he paced the hall his reflections were unenviable.

"Caed mille failthe,"

was inscribed over the wide arch dividing the hall, and never was motto more emblematic of the house it adorned. At the extreme end lay the dining-room, corresponding with the drawing-room on this side of the arch, which the young Earl now entered. It was spacious, with beautiful embrasured windows. But alas! the ruin that had overtaken the family was patent everywhere. The once resplendent hangings were

reduced to tatters, and the loose coverings of the chairs were dishevelled and forlorn. To the left of the vast old-fashioned grate stood the Chesterfield on which she—his lately-lost mother—so often sat.

Even now, so familiar was the idea of her presence on that couch, the Earl started back imagining that her fragile beauty—like some haute dame of the old noblesse—with her slender feet peeping forth beneath the dainty frilling of her skirts, ornamented this favoured corner.

Near by was a standard screen bearing an embroidered banner. A biblical picture, representing Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite, as she smote the nail into the temples of Sisera and fastened him to the ground. Beneath were the words:

"The Will of a Wise Woman!"

It had been wrought by one of the family in the remote past, when woman sat and sewed. Doubtless sad thoughts of the terrible heritage were interwoven with each stitch, but in those days, it had not come to the sex to do more than stab the canvas oft moistened with futile tears.

The curse was begotten in this wise.

The first Earl—so created for his effrontery, as the bastard Faulconbridge was made baronet by King John—was a man of extraordinarily dissolute habits. In a lonely cabin on his land he discovered a girl of remarkable beauty; the ancient crone who permitted her to speak to no one was accounted a witch and certainly looked one. The Earl made his first attempt to win her with unusual gentleness. Rendered desperate by failure, he awaited her evening visit to the well for water, when he caught and forcibly detained her, obliging her to drink from a horn he carried until unable to make further resistance. But even as this was achieved, a severe blow from behind obliged him to drop his prey and turn with a cry of pain to receive the curse of the infuriated crone.

"Through you and all the generations that are to come shall run the curse of wine. By the devil by whom you have thought to undo shall you be undone. Never shall the demon of drink die in your veins until the Will of a Wise Woman shall smite it as Jael smote the nail into the temples of Sisera."

As Watford's eyes fell on the screen the story grew vivid. He put his hands to his head with a gesture of despair. It was small wonder reflection but embittered this young man's mourning, intensified the bitterness of natural regret, imbued the memory of yesterday, the yesterdays that had surely begat the misery of to-day with shame—shame that brought the burning colour to his pallid cheek and the shadow of remorse to his aching eyes. He was so young, so terribly young for this hereditary blemish to bristle in his veins. He recalled its ghastly victims—father, grandfather . . . should he prove yet another? She who lay so still and white upstairs, had been done to death by the ruin of all that life held dear, and by fear for his future.

The last scene which had proved just the one straw too much for the loving heart now stilled for ever, recurred persistently. It set his temples throbbing, and flustered his already weakened nerves with a futile repentance.

Have I been wrong to place the result before the reason? . . . Pardon me, for I saw her, Elfrida, Countess of Shafton and Shafto, stretched on the grand bed on which she was born, recalled to the God who gave her life, and she provoked my pity. My loathing of the sin that had poisoned her few years on earth.

Ah, luscious grape and trailing vine! Ah, bloated Bacchus, round whom the rose-decked damsels dance, the day has come when Charon's* coffers overflow with the wins brought by thy victims.

PART I.

THE country slept under a plenteous mantle of purity—for the snow lay thick. Softly and slowly it descended now. Flake after flake working a wonder of no otherwise witnessed whiteness, worthy of God.

At her open window, Yolande awaited the advent of Christmas. The cold was intense, but physical sensation was quenched by moral suffering.

"I cannot, I cannot," she moaned miserably.

Yet all the while she was conscious that the spider's web held her and there was no way out.

^{*} Charon was always paid for rowing the shades of the dead across the rivers of the lower world by the coin placed in their mouths before burial.

Christmas Eve had rivetted her contract of marriage to Watford, Earl of Shafton and Shafto. Yet, it was not the great peer that she loathed so much as the devil that sent him reeling from her presence. Since then she had gone down on her knees to her pompous parent, and besought release from the betrothal her soul abhorred and his money had brought about. But this parvenu had already accommodated his future son-in-law, and the promised payment was position for his only child. To this end had Matthew Harris dowered Yolande with all that calculating brain and grasping hand had won.

This ambitious man could not foresee how nearly his ships were to be wrecked, as he watched the Earl drive away in his flame-coloured dog-cart, over the white velvet road into the black night. And the snow began to cover him also.

"Hark, Een, do you hear it?"

"Surely," acquiesced the girl drowsily, "the stories we heard to-night cultivated our sense of creepy sounds . . . but I am half asleep."

Elfrida, widow of the 11th Earl of Shafton and Shafto, sat up in the old barouche and listened.

When anything untoward threatened the family were warned by the deliberate strokes of a hammer. If the trouble was to pass only the sense of hearing was admonished. If death was imminent vision accompanied sound. It was so now. The Countess beheld the woman Jael smite the nail into the temples of Sisera.

"Dear mother," exclaimed Rowena, love inspiring her with consciousness that something beyond her comprehension was happening, "dear mother, why do you tremble? Horan and the horses are as steady as Father Matthew's pledge and age can make them."

Horan and the barouche appertained to the friends with whom they had made merry this Christmas eve. There had been every description of carriage in the Shafton coach house, now the young Earl's dog-cart and a jaunting car reigned alone.

"The night the Earl—your father, died——" she broke into low moaning.

The intense nervous tension communicated itself in a less degree to Een, who still held her hand.

"Oh, Rowena," she pursued presently, with a dignity that well became her, and speaking as one speaks who sees beyond our narrow vision: "I saw it—living, vivid—and the stroke of the hammer rings sharp, resolute——"

Their carriage stopped. Poor old rheumatic Horan descended stiffly from the box and came to the window as Een lowered it. He was covered with snow, it lay in heavy flakes on his grizzly beard and drifted in, now smiting the ladies with its icy touch.

". Why do you stop?"

Horan, surprised at the imperious tone of one usually so courteous, attempted to tell her. Before he could enunciate she commanded:

"Open the door. Let me out! I know the Earl is lying dead—thrown from his dog-cart."

"No, no, milady, not the Earl-but the dog-cart."

"I know where my son lies in a shroud of snow. Who should know better?" hysterically.

An instant later, despite Een's protests she was in the road, her rich silken draperies trailing on the pure white carpet which engulfed her slim feet. The strain of mental powers petrified physical suffering, even though the chill of coming death congealed her blood.

The high dog-cart lay smashed to pieces in the centre of the road. The horse had kicked itself free and torn terrified to its stable. To the right, clear of the *débris*, was a snow-crowned mound. Instinctively the mother scattered the snow and discovered Watford. Een and Horan began to chafe his hands; the friction induced him to raise his head and open his eyes enquiringly. His breath was rank with spirits.

"Come back to the carriage now, mother," said Een, almost forcibly compelling her to do so.

Indeed the Countess knew there was no choice. In another moment she would have fainted. The relief of finding her son uninjured overpowered her. With the help of Horan he crept slowly after them, his limbs still benumbed. Then they left the wrecked dog-cart to be sent for, and proceeded homewards.

"Horse shied—saw the bloomin' ghost—suppose Pat followed the horse. I must have been shot out where you found me," explained Watford, adding: "I am just choked. Wish I could get a drink."

"You are a brute, Watford," in low, incisive tones. "This will kill mother."

The Countess lay back in her corner, with closed eyes.

"Goodness knows she should be accustomed to it with father," sulkily. "I did not take much to-night."

"Like Cassio, you have very poor unhappy brains for drinking," sneered Een. "As to being accustomed," she glanced towards the fragile figure, "it has sapped her life-blood."

"She wishes me to marry this old plebeian's daughter. I must go to his house—he gives me the best drinks out—brings me to the scratch, ha, ha!"

"Yet I have heard that Miss Harris takes no wine."

"Yolande has never tasted it — her mother was a fanatic on temperance."

"How she must loathe you."

"She does," he laughed defiantly, "would not kiss me; perhaps the day will come when I will not kiss her."

"Love may cure you," she suggested, too young to have given much consideration to the idea of a hereditary curse which neither love nor beauty could uproot.

"I am going to marry her—there is no other course open to me. I am played out."

"I suppose you won't turn mother out of her own home now," sarcastically.

"Yolande does not wish it."

Een checked the exclamation surprise prompted at this mark of deference. As a matter of fact, the Earl lacked audacity to perpetrate this outrage. Every rank would have condemned the extremity of ousting the Countess from her birth-place, albeit a flaw in certain legal documents re the heir rendered it practicable.

They involuntarily turned towards the refined face in the corner of the roomy carriage. A tremor passing over it thrilled them, and the hand that lay in Een's clutched and released hers convulsively.

"The Will of a Wise Woman," she repeated twice, "ah, I never had sufficient will and I was never wise."

Her children spoke to her, but she relapsed into a species of torpor. Universally idolized, the Countess had never experienced contradiction except from Watford. Early succession had been pregnant with evil for one inheriting a tendency to drunkenness, though the presence of a parent wanting in selfrestraint would have proved a dubious privilege. As soon as Watford was able to hold a glass in his chubby fingers, the father had insisted on his appearance at table.

"He shall be no fool, but learn to carry his liquor!"

A worthy boast! And Elfrida, surrounded by a little court of flatterers, laughed at the baby reveller she had borne at the age of seventeen. It was accounted *devilish clever* of the little scamp when he was found overcome by libations under the table. He would toddle back after the feast and tilt the wine-glasses to obtain the drops left at the bottom.

When on this Christmas morning the heavy carriage lumbered through the great gates and approached the castle—even its dilapidations were beautified by feathery garlands of snow—the first slanting shafts of dawn shot across the picturesque wilderness of lawn and garden.

"Call Molly, Watford," said Een, when they reached the entrance.

But it was unnecessary. The old woman, who had been with the Countess from childhood, hurried forward as the Earl alighted.

"Lord have mercy upon us!" she cried below her breath, as her eyes marked the rigidity of the adored features, "this is more of your work," glowering at him.

This was the beginning of the end. Doctors came and went without result. Here was more than physical hurt. Yet perhaps neither the shock to her nerves, nor the chill to her naturally healthy system obtained when her satin-slippered feet sought her son's side in the snow and saved his life, would have been sufficient to kill her separately. But the combination told on her highly sensitive organization. The strain of suffering that might not permit of sympathy, as she had stood by a husband who drank himself to death, and beheld her son travelling the same road, had—as Een said—sapped her life-blood.

As the beautiful woman lay on her bed to all appearance unconscious, she experienced bitter self-accusation. Neglected duty increased the gloom that lowered above the valley of shadows; but when her spirit supplicated for mercy the terrible decree too late was reprieved. Even in this extremity one act of grace was possible. The Countess made a supreme effort and summoned her son's fiancée to her presence.

The secret of that death-bed scene is inviolable. Yolande entered on it in trepidation, she left with the birth of awakened responsibility ennobling her expressive features. Watford, who had been in waiting, was held back by that high look—saintlike as the snow-drops that lay secreted by folds of lisse at her throat.

PART II.

. Cassio. O, thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee devil!

THE magic of gold transformed the lands of Shafton and Shafto, while a still purer currency acted in like manner on their master. Alas! poor, erring human nature found it impossible to believe in good where evil had been dominant. An abstemious Earl of Shafton and Shafto was too prodigious, and while a few kindly souls listened gladly there were more who were out of harmony with such reform. Their own peccadillos had been screened by Watford's elevated position; should he turn Puritan they would suffer exposure.

The Earl and Countess had been absent six months. Meanwhile the keen eye of Matthew Harris had supervised the renovating of castle and grounds. It was a happy home-coming. Yolande had succeeded in drawing into prominence a side of Watford's character never previously recognized. To their mutual joy he found the vice that lowered his moral being, loathsome; freed from its chain life meant so much that was good and useful, and night and morning Yolande felt that the spirit of the dead mother supplemented her cry for help from the cross.

Thus it fell out that the world seemed very good to them as they drove through the entrance up to the Castle, where a new régime was to erase a miserable record.

Yet even on this first night there was a preliminary struggle. Old Matthew Harris enjoyed good wine, and being a competent judge, liked to discuss the merits of what he imbibed. Once, very long ago now, he had travelled in wine. His discrimination had formed the foundation of the pile which had attracted the Earl. Perhaps his success in life may be attributed to his non-comprehension of excess, and, like many short-sighted people,

what he could not understand he could not tolerate. Total abstinence offended him.

"Yolande," he said pompously, spreading his dinner-napkin over his knees, "you can't keep this up, you know"—indicating a water carafe—"there is a life more valuable than your own to be sustained," with a knowing wink at his son-in-law.

Yolande's clear skin flushed, and Watford gave him a look that warned the old parvenu to attend to his fish—the bones of which gave him infinite trouble.

"What, Watford?"—forgetting his manners and speaking with his mouth full in his annoyance—"you must not pass that sherry—you make a mistake . . . there's no brand better calculated to wash down sole. Perhaps you prefer to keep to champagne . . . very well, let us start it now."

"Watford has become my disciple."

Matthew Harris's knife and fork fell with a clatter.

"Well, that scheme won't hold! I suppose, Yolande, you purpose introducing the next earl to the same cold comfort?

Again the delicate face flushed painfully, and Watford was very angry.

"Look here, sir, if you continue to make allusions that—er—render my wire uncomfortable, I shall be obliged to——"

"But it's preposterous! An earl and not to take his glass!"

"Perhaps it is because I am an earl that I can dispense with stimulants. My forebears imbibed sufficient libations to enrich the blood of all coming generations. Yours were not so circumstanced—pray enjoy your opportunity; and let me act on my own, or rather "—glancing affectionately at Yolande—" your daughter's discretion."

"Hang discretion!" said Matthew Harris, surlily, too thickskinned to feel the innuendo he had provoked. "It killed your mother."

Tears stood in Yolande's eyes. Only the echo of the late Countess's admonition enabled her to remain at table.

- "The Will of a Wise Woman."

She must be resolute. The servants entered bearing a fresh course. Watford addressed himself to her during the remainder of the meal. She tried to include her father in the conversation, but he gave himself up to the delights of the table, and was scarcely conscious of what passed. His chagrin at the Earl's

conduct was many-sided. When the Earl drank it sensibly diminished the distance between them. The great gulf between the class to which Watford belonged and the mass from which he had sprung, yawned less aggressively. Indeed, when in the early days of their acquaintance, the young man had drunk heavily, each glass abridged the chasm. The parvenu had found it pleasant to despise the peer.

Alas! poor Yolande was to learn that the devil devoted to the development of the hereditary curse was only couchant. Wherever it was possible for a wife to accompany her husband, she went, but there were duties incumbent on his position which had to be fulfilled alone. All went well until the apoplectic stroke which killed Matthew Harris occasioned the premature birth of an heir and prostrated Yolande, whose spirit would fain have followed her father and child.

Satan stormed the unguarded citadel. With exquisite cunning insinuating that drink was essential when Watford could not eat.

"A glass or two will sustain you in this hour of trial," asserted the tempter.

Watford acted on the suggestion, and when once spirit had passed his lips all power, all desire to stay his hand vanished. Hours passed. And by-and-bye, where the child had lain drunk after emptying the glasses of his father's guests, there the man dropped down undone by the same degrading demon.

The next morning, without even enquiring for Yolande, he left home for London. He dreaded those crystal-clear eyes; he had no pity for her grief and pain—drink deadens sympathy and scorches hallowed love.

And now, breaking in on her delirium, there reached the deserted wife, the portentous stroke of a hammer—sharp and resolute. No vision visited her. Not death but disaster was impending. She called aloud for her husband—a feeble, fruitless cry. Sleep succeeded exhaustion; from it she awoke sane and free from fever. Still, she was restless and watched the door for Dr. Molloy's appearance. When he came she told him she knew of Watford's absence.

"No one told me," she assured him, as he glanced round enquiring who could have afforded her this disturbing information. "I felt he had gone. And now"—beseechingly—"you must come with me to London."

Three days from that time—at the peril of her life, as he told her—Yolande insisted on his accompanying her to her house in Berkeley Square. On arrival, she obediently went to bed, and swallowed a sleeping draught. Dr. Molloy was to be her agent to find out the Earl's address at his club and go to him. He had made arrangements to remain. Her terms were magnanimous, to say nothing of his deep personal interest. How could he have the heart to abandon this fragile but brave woman, knowing in what condition he should find her husband?

So Yolande, knowing that all that could be done was being done, sank to sleep murmuring:

"By the Will of a Wise Woman."

PART III.

Cassio. O, God, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains! That they should with joy, revel, and applause, transform themselves into beasts.

—OTHELLO, Act II., Scene 3.

THREE days of riotous liberty told on the unfortunate Earl with rapid retaliation. The night Yolande crossed from Ireland he spent in solitude, conscious that a little more excess meant delirium tremens. When in the midst of his misery, the memory of the hereditary curse confronted him, there seemed but one way of escape—suicide. But as he rose with the half-formed intention, the face of his wife started forth from among the surrounding shadows.

The devil within him shrieked.

"I can never return to you!" he moaned, falling back on his bed. "Never touch you! Never pollute your presence after . . ."

Then followed spectres of the coarse vices into which the vinous eyes of Bacchus had lured him. But his good angel had not deserted him, again the beloved face wrought its enchantment . . . memories of happy days crept into his heart and held him fascinated until he slept. Thus to his surprise, Dr. Molloy found Watford. When he awoke he turned from his visitor ashamed. Then came a poor attempt at bluster—he demanded the meaning of this intrusion. He strove to be defiant. He hurled a string of semi-coherent invectives at the imperturbable Irishman, who understood the situation and

waited, immovable. When this aggressive phase had played itself out, Watford's utterance was choked with tears and he whined miserably. The doctor having provided for such a contingency, began his cure. Presently having enjoined the servant neither to quit his post or admit anyone, he left the Earl sleeping placidly.

Yolande broke down on finding she might not immediately see Watford. Thus it befel when Dr. Molloy brought him to Berkeley Square, it was to the side of a sick bed. There he insisted on remaining. The Will of the Wise Woman had regained ascendency. Never before, not even by his mother's death, had the hold of the hereditary curse been so shaken. Did he not know that hurried journey to Town, that rush to his rescue, had imperilled Yolande's life?

At length a bright morning dawned. They left London just when the season was at its best, left for Switzerland for the lovely valley of Zermat, at the foot of the Matterhörn. Here presently when Yolande stood amid a wilderness of wild flowers, with a rose-blush on her cheeks and renewed health sparkling in her lustrous eyes, their tongues were loosed.

"Have you forgiven me, darling? You nearly lost your life to save my soul," cried Watford, throwing himself impulsively on his knees and clutching her skirts.

"Nonsense—as for my life—what would it have been, if I knew that the man I loved was drowning everything that was great in him in wine?"

"I have no words," he burst out. "I cannot say what I feel!"

"Do not try," laying a caressing hand on his head. "It was your dying mother's trust—to remember that only by the Will of a Wise Woman might the hereditary curse be eradicated. I was never to forget this, in my thoughts by days or my dreams by night, in my prayers and self-communing."

"Ah, if we could only live here it would be easy to be good!" sighing regretfully. "Here virtue was an existent reality, degrading vice a remote possibility. Oh, if I could but die here, Yolande!"

"No! you have to live and—work. To live down tradition, to prove that God is stronger than Fate."

He stood an attentive disciple, thrilled by her low, sweet voice, her child-like faith. When she ceased, the liquid notes of a lark seemed to bear the glad tidings of the return of one more prodigal to his Father's fold.

Under the shadow of the Matterhörn, there is a dainty little church—built by funds raised by Mrs. Bancroft—in its vestry after receiving the Holy Communion, Watford, 12th Earl of Shafton and Shafto, signed a pledge which he never broke. The Will of the Wise Woman had conquered.

Good heavens, it was all simple enough. With the Creator everything is simple, the crookedness of man induces complication. Yolande did not sit down and wish to cure this hereditary curse. She resolved and acted, strengthened night and morning by the anointing of the Man of Sorrows, as the flowers are strengthened by descending dew.

PENFOUND CRAWFORD.



Orazio Calvo.

By M. P. SHIEL.

Author of "PRINCE ZALESKI,"

Le leggi son fatti pei coglione. Laws are made for dullards.

-Corsican Proverb.

AT a considerable height above the sea level, in the middle of a chaos of mountains, and not very far from Monte Cinto, the culminating point of the chain which traverses Corsica, stands the Villa Calvo. It is a great pile, half castle, half palace—half northern Italian Gothic, half southern Italian Byzantine—rising sheer from the brink of one of those stupendous ravines which are the commonplaces of the island. The ever-growing tale of tourists who sip absinthe and black coffee in the Hôtel Continental or al fresco in the piazza at Ajaccio during the early spring, have not seen it. Its solitude, in fact, could not be more complete. In some of its aspects it conveys the impression of a natural outgrowth of the landscape. Around it stretch those primal forests of ilex and laricio pines, which from of old

caused the island to be described as "thick, and, as it were, savage with wood;" and towering above it—nearly always clad in snow—great crags of gneiss, of granite, of porphyry, and of mica-slate. Four miles away, seated lower down on a ridge, and swept in season by the frigid Tramontana wind, dozes the squalid village of Spello, with its white-washed box-houses, gutter tiles, scavenger-army of wild dogs, and windows paned with paper smeared in oil of olives.

The Villa Calvo itself is now the most forbidding of desolate places. The flags of the courtyard are seamed with wild lavender, and cistus, and the rich grasses of the heights; the two gardens are jungles of lentisk and walnut, the scarlet berries of sarsaparilla, and every kind of sub-tropical bindweed; shutters left open by the retainers as they fled from the house still groan to the highland Levante, or rot in the sun; buzzards and ravens, the deadly spider malmignata, and the black bat know it well; roofs buried in mosses show a tendency to fall in. The place is the very sanctuary of gloom. It is situated, too, on the more deserted side of the island, called by the Corsicans the "near," i.e., the east or Italian side.

The noble house of the Calvi, Venetian in origin, had established themselves as great territorial signori (technical for our "nobleman," and so quite different to the Italian word) in Corsica by means of some one or other of their sons at a very early date. The original stock indeed, after playing a turbulent part in the history of the Republic, extirpated itself by the very exuberance of its own passions, the last of their number perishing by the poisoned dagger of his jealous wife in 1605. off-shoot, however, found in the still greater insanity of Corsican political warfare a congenial life-element, and grew fat. fortress-town of Calvi still bears their name in the north-west. Corsica passed under the suzerainty of Pope, Marquis of Tuscany, Pisa, Genoa, France; and with each change the house of Calvi knew how, by its adroitness, to find a stepping-stone to still greater power. From their sinister activities sprang the factions of Red and Black (Banda Rossa and Banda Nera), and taking the Black side, they became the mysterious centre of those intrigues and massacres which for centuries turned the province into a little hell. Considering the proverbial poverty

^{*} Δασεῖα καὶ ὥσπερ ήγριομένη τῆ ἕλη.-ΤΗΕΟΡΗΚΑΣΤΟΣ.

of Corsica, the revenues of this violent race became enormous; their influence boundless; till at last they grew to be regarded by the peasants with a profoundly superstitious awe. Their power indeed received a check when, joining the popular party in the insurrection of Paoli in '55, they suffered some loss of territories, but most of these were regained under the more favourable régime of the earlier period of the Convention. They were till lately regarded in Corsica as the last surviving of the great feudal signori, who migrated from the mainland between the tenth and sixteenth centuries.

It is, however, of the very latest scion of all of this volcanic family that I wish to speak. I first met Count Orazio Calvo in the midst of a bewildering Maelström of light and music and colour at a masque in his own Hôtel in the Rue de Rome. All the world was there, and I could not for the life of me imagine why he singled me out for the patronage of his talk; I remember, however, that it was his whim to profess a deep admiration for the English, whose language, indeed, he spoke perfectly. I at once set myself to the study of a man whom I saw to be not only remarkable, but unique. To find such a person—a rude Corsican grandee—profoundly learned, of course astonished me, though years of Paris failed to add an atom of real polish to his manners, and though his hardly-concealed contempt for all men and things included a contempt for his own acquirements also. Of the license of the Paris of his day he was the high priest, acknowledged and consecrated. He was known to be an atheist, yet he had his religion—the religion of excess: only, the possible excess of a Mephistopheles, not the excess of a Heliogabalus. It was easy to see that he despised what he did, and did it only because he despised it somewhat less than anything else. Yet he was the opposite of blase; for an altogether abnormal energy was written on every feature of his body. His prodigality was in all cases distinguished by a certain furore of daring and originality; but the feeling he inspired was not so much admiration as fear. His rage was the very rage of the tiger; and though I feel sure he cherished a secret bitterness at the interval which divided him from the rest of men, yet a wise instinct warned the gayest of his satellites in the midst of the wildest Bacchanal never to address him with familiarity. He had a leonine habit of roaming far and wide

through the slums of Paris in the small morning hours; and stories of mad munificences performed by him at such times were circulated; but his charities, I thought, if they existed, could only be the stony, if prodigal, charity of the gargoyle which vomits for the thirsty. Of lovers' love he knew, of course, nothing; and the possibility of little Cupid coming to shoot baby arrows at such a heart, would have been a notion so exquisitely comic, that, had it occurred to anyone it must have set the entire Calvo Olympus in a flare of quenchless laughter. Round such a man, the décadents, the artist-class, the flâneurs and étoiles, and all the unfathomable demi-monde of Paris flocked—he was too volcanic a rough Naturkind to tolerate the monde—calling him king. He received in addition the sobriquet of la petite comète. None of his friends, I was given to understand, had ever seen on the lips of la petite comète—a smile.

In personal appearance he strongly resembled several other Italo-Corsicans whom I have met, and was not unlike that specimen of his singular countrymen who happened to become world-famous. He was below the middle height, and not too stout; yet he gave an impression of extraordinary weightiness, as though molten of lead. His face was of perfect classical beauty; black hair streaked with grey; skin hairless, and of the dirty olive of waxen effigies not yet painted pink. His brow was puckered into a perpetual frown; eyes cold as moonlight, glancing a downward and sideward contempt; forehead bastionné, columnar; jaws ribbed, a hew of graven brass; lips definite and welded; the whole face, the whole man, one, knit, integral—an indivisible sculpture.

Four or five times I met Orazio Calvo in Paris, and always he evinced the same disposition to take me, as it were, by the hand; while I, imagining a distinct element of doubt and even danger in his friendship, rather avoided *la 'tite comète*. I shortly afterwards returned to England, and though rumours of the excessive splendour of his revels sometimes reached me, the count, in the course of some three years had pretty well passed out of my active memories.

Suddenly, one morning, he stood before me in my chambers in London.

He seemed unconscious of my amazement, and informed me with the old air of sultan majesty that he had travelled in his

yacht incognito and alone to England, and a friend being, for certain reasons, indispensable to him, he had sought me out. Health was the jewel which he sought; and, in truth, he looked haggard enough. "The bracing country air of Britain"—could I assure him that under conditions of perfect quiet and seclusion?

Noting in him a tendency to puff and corpulence, I suggested vigorous exercise. Something that I took to be a laugh rattled in his throat. But why not?—I insisted. If he would not walk, had he never heard of such a thing as the bicycle? I myself took an annual tour through parts of England by that means, and should be delighted to accompany him now.

With this suggestion he finally fell in, and we started. It was the beginning of the red-ripe Autumn time. The count, it is true, took somewhat unkindly to his machine, once flying into a hurricane of passion and making it the object of a rain of kicks from his rather short legs. But he quickly began to show signs of the connection between this method of locomotion and bodily well-being. The journey became more and more pleasant, till we reached a delightful retreat in Dorsetshire—a little farm belonging to a widow lady, whom I had long numbered among my friends.

This lady, of comparatively humble social position, was also of that entirely lovable type of English woman characterised by a profound natural piety—sedately gay, puritan, perennially fresh—whose qualities unite to remind one of the wholesomeness and sweetness of home-made bread. The two extremely lovely young ladies, her daughters—Miss Ethel and Miss Grace—added to her odorous home something of the colour and the charm of Paradise.

I may mention incidentally that the two girls were twins, though they possessed none of the resemblances so often accompanying this condition. Grace, with a complexion of dawntinted snow, was dark, rather tall, with a superb neck; Ethel was the sweetest flower in the world, fair and winsome.

Into this shadeful and quiet home I, with my friend Orazio Calvo, intruded. I had previously put up for considerable periods at the farm; but our present stay was only timed to last three days. When these had passed, however, others followed, a week, two. My companion showed no disposition to depart. It was the golden season of harvest, and with remarkable gal-

lantry for him, the count daily escorted the ladies on their walks in the lanes and fields, entering with them into the life of the country, and watching by their side in the evening the Pan-ic levities of the reapers. His tongue was loosed, and he spoke to them of the world, and its glory. I know not what of misgiving, foreboding, gradually took possession of my mind.

As he sat under the porch by moonlight listening to the pure and simple songs of the ladies, I could see how the cynical man of the world—whose notions of Woman had been derived from the peasant-girls of Corsican villages, and the étoiles of the Ambigu and Variétiés—how he, now first in his life's course, realized that an earthly creature may yet be of heaven. I could see him revelling in the transport of an entirely new, a divine impression.

I proposed departure. He refused. I strongly insisted.

"I shall go," I said.

"In which case," he replied, "nothing is so certain as that you go alone."

Then, after a while, a new discovery filled me with new alarm. I believed I could detect in the virgin eyes of both the girls the very abandonment of love for Orazio Calvo.

And one night, after I had retired to sleep, he walked into my room and stood at the foot of the bed, leaning over the rail. The glimmer of a lamp showed me his extreme pallor, the fire that swelled and inflamed his stern eyes. I dreaded to break the long silence between us.

"I love them!" he suddenly exclaimed, paroxysmal in passion. Love them! Every nerve in my body rose shuddering in revolt against him. Love them! Yet the trill of his voice, the trembling bed-rail, left no doubt of the genuineness, the intensity of his meaning.

"But which of them, in God's name?" I asked.

"Which? Miss-Grace-I think."

I think!

The enigma utterly confounded me.

But my vague presentiments were laid to rest when, two months later, the dark-haired Grace was led by him to the altar of the village-church hard by. The young wife was immediately carried off to the Continent. From widely divergent points of the earth's surface—from Delhi—from Memphis—her mother heard from her. Finally she took up her residence in the

mountain home of her husband's race. Her constant promise to revisit England she never fulfilled.

During the space of two years I received several illegible letters from Count Calvo (the vehemence of his temperament hardly permitted his writing to be read; for a steel nib immediately broke to splinters under his hand; and his attempt to write many a word with the quill resulted in nothing but a thick dash)—and two from his wife, in both of which latter I fancied—though I do not say it was more than fancy—that I could detect a note of deep, and even weird, melancholy.

And once again, at the end of these two years, Count Orazio Calvo stood unexpectedly before me in my house. A glance told me that he was a changed man. Some disease surely—I thought. The hungry eyes, no longer cold, shifted incessantly. His fingers clutched continually at some phantom thing in the palm of his hand. My lips formed the word, "Orestes."

"But the countess?" I enquired.

- " Is dead."
- ". Dead!"
- "I say it. Dead!"

I shuddered as he uttered the word.

The same hour he proceeded to the farm, I with him. The news of Grace's death had shortly preceded him by letter. He had sent, too, a lock of her hair, several little mementoes. The little home, when we reached it a second time, was a house of woe.

I soon returned to London, leaving the Count behind me. Five months later, I received a letter begging me to go back to the farm on a matter of some delicacy.

Now, I may as well say at once that I am by no means what would be called a *squeamish* person; that in general I regard the notions of Clapham with so much, and only so much, attention as the superstitions of ancient Egypt. Yet, for some reason or other, I now felt impelled to protest with the most heart-felt ardour against the projected marriage of Count Calvo with the fair-haired Ethel. An instinct—illogical, perhaps, but deep—told me of something uncanny, awesome, in the union. Earnestly did I implore the dear mother, now heart-broken and bereft, to interpose her will. She, too, felt all I felt; but dared not, she said, coerce the overmastering inclinations of the girl.

I accordingly accompanied Miss Ethel to Paris, and on a dark

December day, in the gloomy church of St. Sulpice, saw her united to the object of her ecstatic love.

From her, as from a nature more affectionate and sunny than that of her sister, the letters I received came more regularly. They were dated from the various capitals of Europe, and then for some time from Venice; and in them, too, I found-or thought I found—a tone of heart-sickness, of disappointment. But this feeling, if it existed at all, must have been short-lived; for on taking up her residence at the Villa Calvo, her letters became suddenly voluminous and frequent. Ethel, it was now clear, was happy. In one epistle, I received a long and very comical history of the only visit which ever disturbed her solitude, paid by the podestà and staff-general of Bastia; in another, a gay account of the eccentricities of a haughty old Corsican peasant who did duty as butler. Every trifle seemed to make her joyful; and every sentence began or ended with "her dear lord"; his condescending love for her: her worship of him. Quite suddenly the letters ceased altogether.

It may have been a year and a half after the second marriage that I found myself at Marseilles en route for Southern Italy. That I felt a certain relief when I entered the station to see my train steaming away is certain; but so secret are sometimes the workings of the Will, that I was only half-conscious of the feeling, nor could I explain it. Half an hour later, however, as I sauntered in la Canabière, I was able to read myself. From this point the harbour is fully visible, and looking westward, I caught sight of a little steamer making her way out from Port la Joliette. I was too salted a Marseillais not to know her—it was La Mite, a boat of the old Valéry line not yet grown into the Compagnie Transatlantique: in eighteen hours she would be lying at anchor in the harbour of Ajaccio. I hastened to the quai region; the vessel was then puffing under the guns of St. Nicolas. I accosted a group of propped watermen:

"Tell me—is it at all possible to catch her now?"

They looked lazily at her.

"She's off," said one, "le bon diable même ne saurait-"

My desire must have been very great, if it was at all equal to my disappointment.

I continued my way eastward; again and again finding it necessary to prove to myself that it was absurd to go out of one's way to visit forgetful friends. Fréjus, Genoa, Pisa—

keeping always to the coast—I reached at last the central point between Pisa and Rome. Here, at Follonica, I stopped short—over-mastered—and travelling by horse, reached the coast village of Piombino, opposite the singular island, tombstone-shaped, called by the Romans Œthalia, and now Ile d'Elbe; there made terms with the padrone of a small speronare, and in twelve hours landed at Bastia. I was bent upon visiting Count Orazio Calvo in his fortress home.

Mounted on a small Corsican pony, and accompanied by a guide on a mule, I turned southward, and began the ascent. The fever-mists of the low-lying east coast hung heavy, and under this pall, interminable stretches of makis (thick copse) flamed with arbutus leaves, and the purple of maple fruit, and were aromatic with the myrrh of cisti. Here and there on the dizzv edge of a ravine, a solitary hut; or in the depths of the wood, the dole of a shepherd's bagpipe; now the tinkle of goat-bells from afar, now the flap of a raven's wing, or the momentary phantom of a brown wild sheep (mufri). guttural companion spoke continually on the subject of the brigands. Twice only we passed through mountain villages, and in the afternoon of the second day reached Spello. short remainder of my upward way I continued in accordance with verbal directions. Before long the Villa Calvo rose sternly before me.

I crossed a dry flat moat, and made fast my animal to a staple in one of the granite pillars of the gateway. Silence pervaded the place. I noticed a decided rankness in the garden on each side of the forecourt. Ascending a flight of marble steps, I rang an iron bell hanging beneath one of the two front porticoes. Its clanging made a sharp break in the stillness. But to my repeated summonses there came no answer. At last I boldly pushed back the unfastened portal, and entered the house.

So long I wandered about, that at last, in a complexity of long velveted corridors and dim chambers, I lost my bearings. The impression wrought on me by the deserted bigness of the mansion was intense. Even my own footfall was inaudible. The evening was now darkening toward night. From where I stood I heard the chirping of a cicada. By an effort I raised my voice and called, but only echoes answered me. In an elliptical apartment, I found a table spread—the white cloth, wines, all

the restes of a meal, gold and silver plate, faded grapes; a clock on a pedestal of ebony, it had ceased to tick; in another chamber I came on a lady's garden-hat on a divan. And over all the dreariness of Gethsemane. Trembling hesitancy to proceed further possessed me.

In a remote wing I came at length to a passage, in the wall of which was a nail-studded Gothic door. It occasioned my surprise, for though it now stood ajar, it was provided on the outside with shot- bolts, and from this side a large key still projected. I entered the suite to which it admitted. The rooms were furnished with exceptional splendour, and here a piece of music, there an article of jewellery, seemed to betoken the habitual presence of a lady. Then in the middle of a carpet something chanced to meet my careful outlook which fully confirmed me in this supposition—two very long hairs. At this sight I found it necessary to call up all my courage. With the daring of despair I picked up one of the filaments, and held it to the just dying violet light filtered through the stained glass of the casement. I expected-I must, I think, have expectedto find it of the blonde nuance of the Countess Ethel's hair. A sob of horror burst from me when I saw it lie on my palm dark as the brown of Vandyke.

Yet another long, heart-torturing search, and in a loftier part of the building I faced a draperied door. On attempting to push it back, I discovered it to be locked. Yet this door I determined to open, if I could; and again I bent all my strength to the effort. It remained closed, hiding its mystery. It was only when on the point of moving away that I noticed, just projecting from under the bottom, a white substance. I stooped and drew it out. It was now dark, but I could see that it was a large envelope, and, peering close, detected my name in the writing of the count. With this in my hand I hurried from the spot—through the vast house of desolation—beyond the bounds of the whole gloomy and terror-haunted domain.

"My friend," thus ran, in the somewhat explosive, Æschylian style so characteristic of him, the all but indecipherable MS. of Count Orazio Calvo—"this document which I address to you will in all probability never reach you. I write it, however, rather by way of monument to my own integrity, than with the hope that it will be read by other eyes.

"My friend, that foul and hellish monster, Pope Clement VII., pronounced in 1525 a curse against the sons of my race. It has been a secret tradition with my uncultured fathers to believe all-unwillingly in its ultimate fulfilment. Perhaps even I myself, in spite of a life of search into the make and meaning of the universe, have been unable wholly to expel some lingering half-credence in this ancient superstition.

"That the malediction has at last overtaken us is now a certainty. With me my race expires. I write this as a protest—and a defiance—against a fate wholly unmerited.

"You cannot doubt that I loved—you could not be so lunatic. And you know, too, that I never withheld my hand from any joy. To desire, with me and the stock of which I come, has always been to possess.

"But soon after realizing my passion, I was confronted by a stupendous problem. In order to solve it I made a leap into the dark, and married—the Countess Grace. I expected happiness. Happiness was far from me. The poor lady, seeing my bitter disappointment, pined. The splendour of her beauty dimmed. After a time I refused to look upon her; to see her face increased my fever. A fire scorched my chest. I traversed the continents, seeking rest; I consulted the greatest physicians; I puzzled them; they pronounced me mad—rabid with the bite of the tarantula. My mysterious malady took only deeper root. I was devoured by the longings of Tantalus—a passion more fervid, and more pure, than the holy rage of the seraphim consumed me.

"When my agonies had reached the intolerable degree, I extorted from my wife, who greatly loved and also feared me, a vow to hold no communication with any of her former friends during the space of ten years. On her knees she implored me to pity her mother, her sister, who would suppose her dead. But in her eyes my bare will had by this time acquired the dignity and force of law, and I moreover soothed her with invented reasons which partially satisfied her intellect. Leaving her among the mountains, with desperate resolve I announced her death, and returned to England. I wedded—the Countess Ethel.

"The gross word 'bigamy' perhaps rises to your mind. My friend, it is immaterial. I, too, at the time, was slightly troubled by some such thought. This second marriage I now know to

have been the most sacred, just, and essential that was ever consummated.

"And now at least, my friend, I looked for peace; and again—again—the mawkish after-taste of the new-awakened glutton filled my mouth. I felt, it is true, some sensible alleviation of my disorder. But my Ethel, observing me still cold, unrestful, grew sad. I found her often in tears. We passed together from city to city, till for a time, we settled in my palazzo on the Canal Grande in Venice.

"The great problem, you perceive, was still unsolved. I loved—with a love of which ordinary men can never dream. But whom?—what? Not Grace, that had been proved. Not Ethel, that was being proved. Then whom? The discovery that waited for me was doubtless accelerated by the wild, brief joy that filled me whenever I left Venice to visit Corsica, or Corsica to visit Venice. Faint glimpses of the truth must have lighted me then; but many months passed before, on a starry night, as a gondola floated me slowly over the Canalazzo, I started up with a shout, my soul flooded with the whole supernal secret of the mystery.

"The very next day I returned to Corsica. My friend, attached to the Villa Calvo is a wing wholly cut off from communication with the rest of the house, save by a single door. It was used in former centuries by some of the women of my race -for periods sometimes of several years-as a place of penitential retreat. These erring souls were careful, however, that their hermitage should be wide and luxurious; the high-walled little garden at the end afforded them a place of exercise; a separate kitchen and staff of attendants compensated for a too rigorous devotion to their rosaries, their prie-dieu, and their breviaries; a door bolted on the wrong side guarded them from contact with a world they had too much loved. Into this wing I now introduced the Countess Grace. Her love was thereby tested to the utmost; not, I tell you, without a struggle did my will subdue her high soul. 'Am I then-a free Englishwoman -a prisoner in a Corsican castle?' she asked. 'Aye-a prisoner,' I replied, 'but a prisoner to her prisoner.' Seeing me foam and grovel at her feet, she had pity and yielded. An aged servant of my father, sworn to secrecy, a captive with her, supplied her wants. The other menials, save two, I dismissed. Then I set out for the mainland, and returned to Corsica—with Ethel.

"It was a step bold, but necessary to my sanity. For of the full nature of my passion I was now aware. I did not, as I have said, love the two countesses severally, but-and here was the tremendous secret of my destiny-I loved them conjointly. I write, you think, the drivel of a maniac? If you think so, be sure that the reason is your own shallowness, your own Can it be that you have investigated the nature of things to so little purpose as to imagine that you know? Strange births, multiple births: the mystery of chemical combination; of all welding processes, from the welding of metals, to the adhesion of flesh to bone, to the welding of spirits; what is a unity, what a duality: the mystery of the thing named soul—have you then probed these matters? There is none, my friend, wholly dark but him who dreams that he knows! Tell me only this: which of the halves would you love were your wife bisected by a Neither much, I think? Yet the two tothunderbolt? gether—? So I, too, loved an entity, not either of the parts which composed it. The woman I adored was the woman who would have been born, had the birth of which Grace and Ethel were the product been single and not double. It happened indeed to be double; but do not imagine that that in any way affects the original aggregation either of spirit or of matter. It became clear to me that when the two countesses stood shoulder to shoulder the woman I loved was there. respect of me, completed each other. Upon such secrets does the daily sun shine. One—a mystic one, a dual one, if you will -but not two-was my bride. To my soul, now made clairvoyant by its passion, they formed, though divided in the flesh, a single being.

"And as the copper and the zinc, kept asunder, remain ineffectual, but put into approximation, evolve the most potent motive in the universe—so they. The effect of rapture which nature had rendered them capable of producing upon me depended, it was clear, upon their physical juxtaposition. So it was in the first instance at the farm, where the impression wrought upon me was an impression not effected by either, but by both; and it was this impression which had caused me to love. It was therefore essential to my happiness that they should dwell within the same walls—house beneath the same roof—that I should pass straight from the goddess grandeur of the one to the laughter and the love of the other.

"This I accordingly accomplished. And now began a lifefor me, for them—of such exceeding bliss as earth contained not beside. No longer could either doubt the genuineness of my passion. My fever vanished. Each revelled in my new-born tenderness. Ah! they loved. Some of the letters written by the Countess Ethel to you at this time I saw; did they not speak of an existence crowned with joy? Grace, too, forgot her repinings, the gloom of her seclusion, in the wealth of the affection I lavished upon her. A shade of anger might cross me if Ethel would revert to the forbidden subject of the decease of Grace, urging me to describe her death-bed. Otherwise all was halcyon. I spent by the side of my Grace those hours of the day during which Ethel supposed me engaged in study; and though my beauteous captive still gently chid me for concealing the secret reasons which moved me to debar her from the rest of the house, she seemed little by little to grow reconciled to my whim, and in her dark eye shone only the light of love and peace.

"My friend, one day in this azure sky the blackness of hell arose.

"I beheld my Ethel stand by night—in the part, too, of the house most remote from her apartments—before the bolted door, and *listen*. Observing my eye upon her, she moved stealthily, guiltily away. I stood rooted—struck by a thunder-bolt—to the spot. So then, she knew—she knew—that there was something—something hidden, forbidden—behind those bolts and bars!

"This incident unloosed once more in me the demon of gloom. I grew acutely suspicious. Suppose, I whispered to my heart, suppose—— The thought dimmed my eyes. I turned myself into a lynx's eye to watch.

"My moodiness fell straightway upon them both. Grace grew silent, once again resentful, carping; Ethel dreamy, pensive. She ceased to write to you. The laughter was quenched. Weeks passed. I tracked shadows in the dark; I probed to the bottom the creak of a plank at midnight. That vague suspicions, presentiments filled the mind of Grace, I could no longer doubt. One day, throwing off her fear of my anger, weeping on my shoulder, the gentle Ethel boldly questioned me as to what dreadful secrét I hid from her 'in the western wing.' Great God! I silenced her with a reproof.

"But that the catastrophe to happen was inevitable, I should have known. The situation was all too tempting for the forbearance of the Parcæ. Here were all the elements of a disaster, needing but the touch of Fate, the match to the mine, to blow our lives into annihilation. And when the tragedy came, it came with an all-destroying suddenness.

"For as I sat and read in the dead of the night. I knew that a gentle tread went swiftly past my door. I arose and crouching cat-like, followed. I could discern a bent form in the gloom of the unlighted corridor. God! and now the moonlight streamed in from a window, and beamed athwart a female figure draped in loose attire. I was convulsed with earthquake shocks of rage. Ethel, I hissed to the floor on which I crawled-Ethel again—spying by night! She took the way to her own bedchamber, of old occupied by her sister. And now she reached it—drew open the door—the light from within gushed out upon her: I saw-by the powers of blackest hell!-the arrogant throat, the ponderous cataracts of dark-brown hair - Grace! And in that room was Ethel! I rushed forward. For one insensate moment only they stared crazily, crazily into each other's eyes—then from their two throats a shriek so shrill that it must have pierced even to distant Spello-and they flew like maniacs to each other's straining arms.

"It is curious that at this supreme instant, my first unconquerable instinct — the instinct of the Corsican vendetta blood-hound-was to plunge a sword into the bosom of the ancient servant through whose betrayal this woe had befallen us. I crept away in the darkness, and ran towards the western wing, pausing only to take a loaded blunderbuss from the armoury. The bolted door I found secured as usual, and indeed, I alone kept the key; the countess had escaped then through the gate in the wall of the garden, and of this the old man was the guardian. He had thus been either false or careless. As I passed inward, there was light. I noticed lying on an escritoire a scrap of paper. I took it, and read: 'I have chanced to hear a soft sound of singing at nightfall. Whoever you are, try, if you are sorrowful, to escape—to see me. Help, if my help can save, shall not be wanting.' It was unsigned, and the writer, dreading the chance of my eyes, had carefully disguised her hand-yet I knew. With redoubled fury I ran from room to room to find my faithless servant; he presently sighted me, and darted with the alacrity of youth down the steps into the garden, screaming his innocence. He hid among the trees, till marking him well, I fired. Loudly bellowing, he fell. I found later that the others too, hearing the screams and turmoil, and fearing my, frenzy, had fled the house.

"I returned to the chamber of the fatal meeting. The two ladies, hand in hand, rose and confronted me. In the gentle eye and the bold eye alike I read my doom—resistance active, resistance passive to my will, even to the death. I know their mother—her quiet but adamantine resolution in matters where the religious *motif* intervenes. And as she, so they. I did not at all doubt that I could sooner turn the sun to ice than move them from their purpose of rebellion.

"'We have no avenger,' said the stately countess Grace, 'but with our own hands we shall protect ourselves from outrage,' and she raised a jewelled dagger as if to strike my breast.

"'Oh, no, no, Grace,' cried Ethel interposing, 'not him, my love—strike me.' Then turning to me with tears—'Oh, why, why did you wrong us, who love you, thus?"

"'To your own apartments, madam,' I said to Grace.

"Not yet had my voice lost its intonation of command. Struggling to disobey, with face of ashen hue, she slowly relinquished the hand of her sister—and obeyed.

"And so ended for ever our dream of joy. What further life was now possible for any of us? An hour later, in pity, I waited upon my first-wedded with a goblet of wine. Knowing my meaning, she refused—not angrily, lovingly rather—to drink from my hand; but sweetly yielded up her glorious form when with forceful tenderness I seized it. Alas! the crack. and her sigh, ring like a lunacy in my brain. Ethel, on the other hand, drank without a murmur of the cup I offered, from beneath her lids gazing steadily upon my face with her most blue reproachful eye. She drooped dead upon my breast, smiling, lisping the words: 'Orazio-husband!' No Voceradori of my land shall wail strange alalas over their silence. lie together on the couch to which I bore them. The first cold grey of the dawning day steals in upon me as I write. half-emptied goblet is by my side. My friend, their bed is wide! I go-to pass with them-with Her-into the Kingdom of Forgetfulness. Farewell!"

So ended the count's narrative.

In this World, or the Mext.

By FLORENCE MARRYAT.

KATE CARLINGFORD, the heiress of the season, was standing before her mirror one evening, whilst her maid dressed her for a dinner party. Her frock was of black chiffon, for she was still in mourning for the uncle from whom she had inherited her fortune, and round her fair throat was a single row of brilliants, whilst a spray of the same precious stones flashed in her dark hair.

She was greatly to be envied—so the world thought, and so she thought herself, unheeding the blind her riches would prove to the true characters of her so-called friends. She was a fine-looking young woman of two-and-twenty—with a good deal of self-esteem and confidence in her power to look after herself.

The maid was fastening the last butterfly bow on her shoulder, when a tap came on the bedroom door, and a card was handed in on a silver salver.

"A lady waiting to see you, if you please, madam!"

Kate lifted the card with knitted brows.

"A lady. At this time of night? Oh! Mrs. Bennett! What on earth can she want with me? Any message, Anderson?"

"Only that the lady wishes to speak to you very particularly, madam, and she will not detain you more than a minute!"

"It is very extraordinary—however, show Mrs. Bennett up here. Say that I am dressing for a party, and cannot come down. And—I think that is all, Sarah, so you had better go, but let me know as soon as the carriage is at the door."

"Yes, madam."

The maid laid a white brocaded silk cloak by her mistress's side, and withdrew, just as Mrs. Bennett was shown into the room.

The new-comer was a very pretty woman—a brunette of the rarest type, quite Spanish in her colouring, and the possessor

of a most charming figure. But she seemed nervous and unstrung.

"This is a surprise," exclaimed Kate Carlingford, as she shook hands with her visitor. "I hope that nothing is wrong, that you pay me so late a visit. And unfortunately, I can spare you but a few minutes, for I am going to dine with the Tressiders."

"Oh, I know! It is unconscionable of me to disturb you at such an hour, but only the direst necessity—Oh! Miss Carlingford, I am in such awful trouble—I don't know what to do!" and here Mrs. Bennett hid her face in her hands and commenced to cry.

Kate Carlingford had rather a hard nature where her own sex was concerned. Tears did not soften her—they rather had the opposite effect. But Captain Bennett had the reputation of not treating his pretty wife well, and she was curious to learn what he had done now.

"A matrimonial squabble, I suppose!" she remarked, "it will soon blow over, and how can I help you out of it? That is a puzzle to me."

"No, no, it is nothing of the sort," replied the other, through her tears. "John has been no worse than usual, but we are in a terrible strait. My husband has got into great difficulties, but they are only temporary ones—if we could raise a little money at once, it would be all right, and I have come—Oh! how shall I say it, for I know we have no claim on you—but will you lend me two hundred pounds?"

The murder was out now, and Kate was naturally surprised. Mrs. Bennett was only a recent acquaintance, and though she had been poor herself in her early days, she had come to love her money already, and did not like the idea of parting with it. But her pride made her shrink from refusing. She was known to have a rent-roll of five thousand a year. How could she decently refuse to lend a friend two hundred? But she demurred at it.

"It is a large sum," she said, "and I don't know what my trustees would say about it. I should have to consult them first."

Mrs. Bennett's face fell.

"Should you? But you are of age. Is not your money your

own? Oh! Miss Carlingford, you don't know what this loan would be to me—to us! It means life—liberty—salvation. And we will pay it back almost directly, I swear it. It is only for an immediate necessity. I shall have plenty next week, or the week after. And I hoped, since you are so rich and generous, that——"

"Why didn't your husband come and ask me himself?" demanded Kate. "A man's security is worth more than that of a woman."

"Because he does not know that I am here—he must not know—it was my own idea, but it will spell happiness for more than one person. Oh! Miss Carlingford, if you only would!"

"If you please, madam, the carriage is at the door," said a voice from the outside of the room.

"Well, I must go now, but I will think of it," said Kate, as she drew her cloak upon her shoulders, "to-morrow I will write and let you know my decision."

"To-morrow—to-morrow will be too late," exclaimed Mrs. Bennett, passionately, as she grasped Kate's cloak in her hands. "Miss Carlingford, consider; you have so much, and we, so little. Lend me this money and I promise you, in the name of Heaven, that it shall be faithfully returned. You have received so much—be merciful to those in want. I declare to you that if I cannot get this money to-night, I will not live to see to-morrow. I will destroy myself. Only two hundred pounds. Why, that spray of diamonds in your hair must have cost as much! For God's sake, lend it me for a little while."

Kate hesitated. She was rather superstitious, and half afraid lest, if she steadfastly refused Mrs. Bennett's request, coupled with such solemn adjurations, some misfortune might happen to herself. It was this feeling, and not pity, or generosity, that made her hesitate.

"But I don't know what Mr. Broderick will say," she temporized. "He is so very particular in looking over my accounts."

"I will return it before he has time to do so," returned Mrs. Bennett, with the tears streaming down her face. "Do, do! dear Miss Carlingford, and your goodness will be returned fourfold into your bosom."

Kate did not know how to refuse any longer. She felt she was doing a foolish thing, but something urged her to comply with the request. She went to her Davenport, and hastily wrote a cheque for the amount, and thrust it into the hands of her visitor.

"There, there," she said. "Now, remember, I have your promise to repay it, as soon as it is possible."

Mrs. Bennett could scarcely believe her good fortune. She looked at the cheque and then threw her arms impulsively about the neck of her benefactor.

"God bless you!" she exclaimed, "God bless you for ever! You have saved my life! You have made me a happy woman! And remember, I have sworn to repay you, either in this world, or the next, and—I will do it!"

"In the next," laughed Kate Carlingford, "I would prefer it to be in *this* world, please! I don't think it would be of much use to me in the next."

"In this world, or the next," repeated Mrs. Bennett, as she wiped her wet eyes, and smiling, bade her friend adieu. In another minute, she had left the house, and the heiress was rolling away to the Tressiders', feeling she had done a rather foolish thing, but hardly knowing how she could have avoided it. It would have been terrible had her friends been ruined for want of it

She heard no more of the Bennetts for the next week and she did not like to enquire, lest it should seem as if she wished to remind them of their debt. But at the end of that time, the newspapers were full of the account of the wrecking of an Atlantic steamer, by which several hundred lives were lost, and very few, in comparison, saved.

The list of passengers who had perished had not yet been published, when Marion Harcourt, who was Kate's most intimate friend, came into her room, bursting with a big bit of news.

"Oh! my dear!" she cried, "have you heard this dreadful story about poor Amy Bennett?"

"No! What is the matter with her?" cried Kate, her thoughts flying at once to her two hundred pounds.

"Her name is down on the list of the drowned in the Gerusha! I rushed to her husband at once to learn if it was true, and it is, sure enough."

"Amy Bennett on board the Gerusha," said Kate in amazement. "But she was here—with me—last Thursday evening!"
"With you? What for? It was Friday morning that the Gerusha sailed from Liverpool. Did she tell you of her intention?"

"Not a word! She came to borrow money from me! She said that her husband was in difficulties, but would repay it very shortly. She must have borrowed it on purpose to take this voyage, but she didn't mention a word about it!"

"Oh! Kate, and did you lend her any?"

"I did, I am sorry to say—two hundred pounds!"

"Two hundred pounds," repeated Mrs. Harcourt. "Oh! my dear, you have sent her to her death. And the worst of it is, Kate, that she didn't go alone. Poor Captain Bennett has ascertained that from the ship's books. There was some man with her, who pretended to be her husband, and shipped under the same name. Her name only appears amongst the list of lost, so it is supposed he is amongst the passengers landed in New York. Captain Bennett suspects who it is, but has no proof. He is heart-broken over the whole affair, and has made arrangements for leaving England at once. What a mercy she left no children! She must have been thoroughly bad!"

"Are you sure she is gone?" demanded the heiress, in awestruck tones.

"Sure, my dear, when the vessel was wrecked in mid-ocean. She was certainly not saved, poor creature!"

"And so there goes my two hundred pounds!" exclaimed Kate, "that is what comes of trusting a woman! And she was so sure that she should repay it! I suppose she depended on the partner of her flight to do so. 'In this world, or the next,' she said, and so solemnly. I really believe she meant it! But catch me lending anybody money again."

"She can have had no truth in her! Fancy! imposing on you for so large a sum. And to enable her to run away from her husband. Oh! shameful! She has deceived us all round. I know the Bennetts did not get on very well together, but if you had seen his distress at losing her, you would have said he could not be so very bad after all."

"Ah! it is easy to appear distressed, or even to feel so, perhaps, when we see the consequences of our bad actions,"

replied Miss Carlingford. "But I cannot help thinking that when Mrs. Bennett borrowed that money, she meant to repay it! She bade God bless me, and said that it had made her so happy. She thought she was going to America with the man she loved, and she is at the bottom of the sea with my two hundred pounds. Poor little woman!"

Marion Harcourt could not understand Miss Carlingford's mood. She advised her to try and recover the sum through Captain Bennett, but though she did not like losing it, she refused to mention the subject again.

"It's gone, and there's an end of it," she said. "I'm very sorry I lent it, but it will be a lesson to me for the future! But she meant to repay it, and I can only think of the terrible end which prevented her doing so. Pray don't say anything more about it!"

Mr. Broderick, her trustee, grumbled a good deal when he next looked over her accounts and found such a large sum missing, of which she refused to give him any explanation, except that she had given it to a friend.

He called her wasteful and extravagant, and reminded her that the largest fortune in the world could not stand unnecessary drains upon it, and the discussion ended by a quarrel, during which Kate told him that she should do as she chose with her own, and begged that he would be good enough not to interfere with her affairs.

She lamented the circumstance a little in secret, but it gradually faded from her mind, and Amy Bennett and the loss of the two hundred pounds became things of the past.

As the possessor of such a fortune, it may be supposed that Kate Carlingford was much sought after by the other sex, who rank money far above beauty, or intellect, or virtue. Men are never behindhand in crying down the mercenary disposition of girls who marry for wealth, having no means of making it for themselves—but what of their own natures, which impel them to vie with each other to secure an heiress, although they have been reared and educated with the sole view of supporting themselves.

Kate was handsome, as well as rich, so she was always having attentions paid her, but she had an idea that she ought to get a title in exchange for her fortune. Women dearly love a handle to their names, but no one appeared who was eligible in that particular, until Lord George Musgrave was introduced to her.

He was a fine man of about thirty-five—of indisputable family, being the younger son of a duke—but bearing a character for dissipation and reckless living. Why used women to be such idiots as to be attracted by rakes? They were kept too innocent in those days, and the term signified a fine, dashing, reckless fellow to them—now, when they are more enlightened, they take a rake at his full value, as a despicable, self-indulgent, unclean thing.

Lord George, however, paid a great deal of attention to Miss Carlingford, and after the lapse of a few weeks it was the general talk in Society that they were going to make a match of it.

Kate felt excited at the idea. She cared nothing about the man's private character—it had never been brought before her plainly—but she thought much of his status in society—of his being the son of a duke—and of the possibility of her one day becoming a duchess.

Her guardian pointed out to her the fact of his being penniless, and that all the funds must be provided from her banking book, but she paid no heed to him.

"It will be a fair exchange," she said. "He will bring me a name and position, and I shall give him the wherewithal to maintain both. I have quite made up my mind that if he proposes, I shall accept him."

"Well! I shall take good care that your money is tied up on yourself," grumbled Mr. Broderick, "or this man will make ducks and drakes of it in no time."

The acquaintanceship between them went on, until there could be no doubt of his lordship's intentions, and one day, having asked previously if he could see her quite alone, he called upon Miss Carlingford, with the evident intention of making proposals for her hand.

Kate, flushed and excited, received him in her boudoir, and waved him to a seat, opposite to her own. There was a slight pause whilst he was thinking of the best words in which to put his request, and Kate raised her eyes to regard him.

What was her astonishment and dismay to see standing behind his chair—Mrs. Bennett!

Miss Carlingford was a courageous woman. She thought at

first that she must be mistaken, but on looking again, there stood the apparition, immoveable—dressed as she was when she had last seen her, but dripping with water, and her dark hair hanging over her white, still face.

Kate gave a scream and fell back in her chair. Lord George started up, demanding what was the matter.

"Oh! it is nothing—nothing—the room is too warm!" exclaimed Kate, as she struggled to her feet, the apparition of Amy Bennett remaining behind the empty chair.

"Will you excuse me this afternoon—another day—" stammered Miss Carlingford, "I—I—am not well! I feel rather faint! Pray excuse my seeming impoliteness!" and so saying, she staggered from the room.

Lord George waited for some time to see if she would return, but finding that she did not intend to leave her room again that day, he returned home and wrote her a letter instead.

Kate, meanwhile, though scared and nervous, would not mention what she had seen to anybody, but locked the remembrance in her own breast, wondering what it could mean, and if poor Amy really thought that she required any explanation of the money not having been repaid.

After a few hours of solitude, she became ashamed of her fright, and wrote a cordial answer to Lord George's letter of enquiry, naming an early day for the renewal of their interrupted tête-à-tête.

He came punctually at the time appointed, and she descended to the drawing-room, clad in her most becoming frock, to receive him; but as soon as they had shaken hands and seated themselves, and Lord George had once more opened his suit, Kate looked at him, and there, behind his chair was standing, as before, Amy Bennett—wet and dripping.

She grew very white again, but she did not scream—something, an impulse which she could not resist, forcing her to say:

"Lord George, did you ever know Mrs. Bennett?"

He sprang from his chair, gasping:

- "Amy Bennett! Who has told you of her?"
- "I don't know! No one. But she is standing behind your chair now!"
- "My God!" he exclaimed; "it was not my fault! She urged me to it!"

A light broke in upon Kate Carlingford.

"What do you mean?—she urged you to it! To what?—to accompany her on that fatal voyage—the voyage which proved her death?"

"Miss Carlingford! I assure you—but what are we saying? This is all nonsense. I don't know what you mean. What should Mrs. Bennett have to do with me?"

"I mean the lady who was lost in the wreck of the *Gerusha*. Some one went with her, took her away from her husband, and passed himself off as such. Yes! yes! she is nodding her head. I am right! You are that man! Oh! go away! Go from my sight for ever. Poor Amy has indeed paid her debt in the other world!"

"I don't know what you are talking about!" said Lord George sulkily, as he took up his hat, "nor why I am to be accused of things I never did!"

"Don't dare to deny it," replied Kate sternly. "A light has broken in upon me, and I see it all plainly now! You accompanied her to New York—she thought she would be so happy there, poor little woman—and you were saved and she was drowned—and you heard of me from her, it was my money she borrowed to take you both out there—and she has come back to save me from marrying you! Oh! I am glad—glad! Thank you, dear Amy! The debt is cancelled a thousand times over. Better lose all one has, than be tied to a scoundre!!"

"You are complimentary, Miss Carlingford!" said his lordship as he moved towards the door.

"I do not mean to be anything but frank," she replied; "I am thinking only of what that poor little woman suffered and how she expiated her sin. I am thinking that I did not know there was so much truth and loyalty in her, and that she has saved me from a horrible fate. Good morning, Lord George. The loan has been returned fourfold!"

It was not very long before Kate Carlingford was mated with a good and true man, but to the last day of her life, she was fond of relating how Amy Bennett came back from the Atlantic Ocean to save her from accepting the proposals of Lord George Musgrave.